



THE
ATTORNEY:

OR,

THE CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN QUOD.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

ONE fine afternoon, in the month of October, in strolling a short distance out of the city, I fell in with a tall elderly man, clad in a suit of rusty black. His silvery hair hung over his shoulders, and he had a slight stoop in his gait, as if time were beginning to tell upon him. There was an expression of great benevolence in his face, and a mild, yet joyous twinklé in his eye, indicative of fine feeling. He was watching a group of boys at play on the grass; and occasionally I heard a merry laugh gush from the old fellow, which drew me to his side. I am generally averse from forming acquaintance with strangers; but there was something in the look and manner of this man that attracted me, and induced me to overstep old prejudices. I easily made an excuse to enter into conversation with him, and found him to be the warm-hearted, guileless old man that his looks betokened.

‘A merry group they are. God bless them!’ said

he, pointing to the boys, as they ran, romping, over the green; 'how I love childhood! God stamps his own purity on it; but the world soon wears off the impress. Well, well, I suppose it's for the best.' As he spoke, he moved off, as if to leave the place. But I had no idea of losing the acquaintance which I had just formed; so I walked on at his side. He did not seem at all loth to the companionship of a stranger, and made no secret of his name or whereabouts. The first, he told me, was 'JOHN QUOD;' that he was a solitary man, without kith or kin; and that he occupied a ruinous house in an unfrequented part of the city. From the remarks which dropped from him, I judged that his means were limited; nevertheless he contrived to drop a sixpence in the hat of a beggar whom we passed, and who seemed to expect it when he saw him. Chatting on various subjects, we continued our walk until we came to the central part of the city. Here he took leave of me; and after inviting me to call on him, bent his steps toward his home.

A few days after this, I visited him at his dwelling; and from that time scarcely a day has passed which has not found me lingering about his haunt. There is much in his simple character, and in his dreamy, yet artless mind, to amuse an idler, which I acknowledge myself to be; and his conversation is

so replete with forbearance to the failings of others, and with benevolence to every thing about him, that it wins one irresistibly to him. From what has occasionally escaped him in conversation, I am convinced that he is a thorough stickler for old notions, and a confirmed believer in ghosts and hobgoblins; nor do I think that he would exchange the crazy old tenement which he now inhabits, and of which he speaks in the most enthusiastic terms, for the finest dwelling in the city.

To explain the irregularity in the commencement of the 'Attorney,' it may be necessary to mention that the whole of the following pages first made their appearance in 'The New-York Knickerbocker Magazine,' in monthly numbers, each containing several chapters. At first these numbers were prefaced by a note from Mr. QUOD to the editor of that Magazine, containing the letters of several of the many correspondents who had sprung up about him as soon as it became known that he had a whole haunted house to himself.

By degrees, as he states in the conclusion to his story, his correspondents became too numerous for him to trespass further upon the pages of the periodical with their letters and his replies; and at this time he left off prefacing the 'numbers,' and devoted himself exclusively to his story.

Thus much, as a friend of Mr. QUOD, I felt called upon to say ; and having discharged this duty, I can do nothing more to protect him from the risk which he has chosen to run, in trusting his work to so fickle a thing as 'public favor.'

February, 1842.

J. T. I.

THE preceding pages were written ten years since, during a temporary absence of Mr. QUOD from the city. But my friend has since departed on that long journey from which there is no return, and I cannot let the occasion pass without a few words of tribute to his memory.

He was a genial old man, of great simplicity of character, with a large heart and a shallow purse, which two peculiarities he maintained to the end of his life.

He came into the neighborhood where he has laid the scene of his tale, a stranger, with rather an ominous character, from the fact of his having quartered himself in a haunted house. But by degrees he gathered friends about him. He had an ear ever open to the call of distress, and all who were poorer than himself, and appealed to his bounty, had the 'run' of his pocket. He was stern in his sense of right and wrong, but his justice was tempered with mercy, and from the bottom of his heart there was constantly welling up a spring of charity to his fellow-man; and although vice met a rebuke at his lips, its accompanying wretchedness always received relief.

His neighbors shook their heads at him, and called him a credulous old fool, and said 'he deserved to be as poor as he was;' but their hearts softened when

they heard that he was ill and like to die ; and that the mild face and kindly voice which had been used to greet them as they passed his door would soon be missed for ever.

I more than suspected that he had met with troubles and disappointments in early life, but what they were I never knew. A sad tone or a heavy sigh, as he spoke of the failure of hopes and projects in days gone by, were all that ever escaped his lips on the subject. Whatever his troubles or trials had been, they had only tended to render him more alive to the sorrows of those about him.

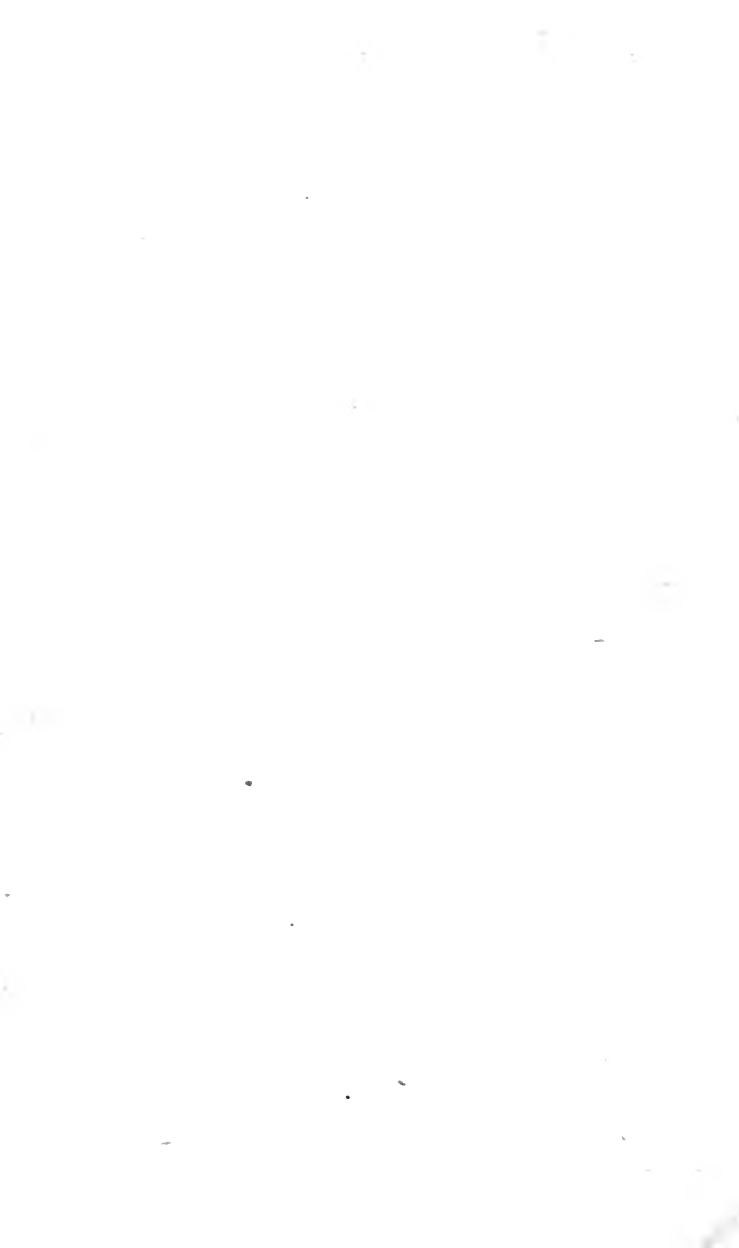
His funeral was well attended by his neighbors, for he had written a book and had occupied a haunted house, the latter being a most unquestionable ground for notoriety ; and whatever his faults or foibles may have been, they were then forgotten. Even those who had sneered the most at his credulity, gathered in sad silence about his grave. They had learned how poor he was ; and that his charity had been afforded out of means far more limited than their own. Though his worldly wealth was gone, they felt that he had treasured up for himself kind memories in the hearts of the poor and wretched, which they could never gain ; and that his good deeds would follow him to that far-off land whither he was gone.

J. T. I.

THE ATTORNEY;

OR THE

CORRESPONDENCE OF JOHN QUOD.



THE

QUOD CORRESPONDENCE.

FROM my boyhood, Mr. EDITOR, I have been a day-dreamer; and the habit which I then cherished remains with me even now, when my step is tottering, and the furrows are deepened in my cheek. I have woven many a bright-leaved garland around the future, and have lived to see its flowers fade and its freshness wither; yet I regret not the time as misspent, for dreams, whether waking or sleeping, are realities while they last; and so they be but golden ones, happy is he who can steal the bright moments of their duration from the stubborn realities of existence.

I have seen some borne on with wind and tide in their favor, while I, who started with the same bright prospects before me, have been left behind in the race. I have had my hopes and schemes and projects, and have seen them blighted and destroyed. Those whom I trusted have proved false, and those whom I have loved have been gathered in their graves, until I am wandering almost alone through life;

but I have endeavored to forget the past, to shut out the feelings of distrust which at times would gather around my heart, and to look forward with a hopeful eye to the future.

As it is my wish, if possible, to secure a corner in your good-will, I will enter somewhat into the details of my life and history. My father was a distinguished schoolmaster in this city ; an eccentric and stern man, with a cold, calculating eye, a heavy hand, and a strong antipathy to all dull-headed boys. He took a pride in the progress of his pupils ; he felt that he owed a debt to their parents, and faithfully he discharged it. His payments, however, were in various coin. The bright boys were praised, the young boys encouraged, and the idle ones most assiduously flogged. During school-hours, his discipline knew no distinction between myself and the others. Whatever may have been his paternal feelings, I was too much of an idler not to merit his castigation ; and many were the efforts made to stir up my intellects, by repeated and severe applications to a part of my person in which, even to this day, I cannot believe that they were situated. I was a stubborn, stalwart boy ; and when wincing under the rod, I vowed to myself that I would pay off the score when I became a man ; but I found the grave a strange queller of angry feelings. My father died ; and when I saw the green turf piled upon his last resting-place, I wept in very bitterness and desolation of heart. He had always been a frugal man, and by hard labor had gained a bare competence, which at his death became mine. With this I set out in life to seek my fortune. It is useless to detail the success of my various pursuits. Years had passed on, and I had tugged at the oar with others like myself, until I at length found myself an old man, with the great task of life as incomplete as ever.

Shortly after my father's death, I took an office in a dark,

gloomy building in the neighborhood of Wall-street, where I kept like a spider in my nest, on the look-out for the unwary ; but month after month waned ; my desk, and the few books which formed my library, became covered with dust ; the walls were hung with cobwebs ; and the ink dried in my inkstand, but no one broke in upon my solitude. I had formed an acquaintance with an old and eccentric man, who occupied a small room in the upper part of the same house. He was a crabbed, crusty fellow, grim and gaunt in appearance, very proud and reserved, and equally poor. His troubles and wants, however, he kept to himself. A kind of acquaintance grew up between us, which gradually ripened into something like intimacy. At seven o'clock in the morning he quitted his room and locked the door, carefully putting the key in his pocket, and at the same hour in the evening he returned. He was a man of precise habits, and always as the clock struck seven I heard his heavy step on the stairs. What he did for a livelihood I never asked. All that I knew, or cared to know, was, that he was one of the few who ever seemed to value either my friendship or my acquaintance.

At length he grew ill and took to his bed. I attended him as well as I could. The pittance which I possessed I spent freely, to obtain for him the few things necessary for a sick-bed. I watched with feverish anxiety during the whole of his illness, but he finally died ; suffering to the last without a murmur.

I remember well the day of his death. It was a fine sunny morning in May : there was a mellow warmth in the soft breeze, as it came through the window ; and as it played with the long gray hair which hung over the weather-beaten and iron-cast countenance of the invalid, and fanned his pale cheek, his spirits seemed to revive. He spoke cheer-

fully of the future, and said that he had thought of making his Will, and had intended to have given me all he had ; that it was little enough—a few old papers in a trunk which he pointed out, and which, he said, had enabled him to wile away many a weary hour. But we will speak of this hereafter. ‘Stop!’ said he, ‘the clock is striking.’ The deep solemn sound of a church clock echoed through the room, and he counted—‘One—two—three—four—five——’ His voice stopped: still the clock tolled on. I turned toward him: there was a change on his features: his head had fallen back on the pillow; the breeze was still playing through his hair, but the life-dream of the poor mortal who had been listening to the deep notes of that bell had ended; and he had passed away, to be seen here no more for ever.

After his death, I made an effort to get on in my profession. I frequented the courts of justice, attempted to elbow my way among the crowd, and to assume an air of business; but it was not natural, and I suspect the counterfeit must have been detected. Others succeeded in the same way, but I remained as empty-handed as ever. This effort was my last. I felt that the seal was set to my fate; and determined to withdraw myself from a pursuit which, to me, brought nothing but pain and mortification, and to content myself with the little that I had received from my father.

This is but a slight sketch of the early part of a life which has been full of change, and full of good and evil.

I now occupy a room in the upper part of a large building in which a murder was committed some years since; and as it has ever since had the reputation of being haunted, the landlord, a liberal man, was willing that I should peril my body or soul for the benefit of his property—at a low rent. The room is dark and dingy, with high ceiling and time-stained walls. I found a profusion of musty law papers

scattered about, a few broken chairs, a table on which were the stumps of several pens, and scraps of paper, all covered with dust. The grate still contained the cinders of the fire which burned there at the time of the murder. Whatever was useful, or worth having, had been carried off, until nothing was left except the few articles which I have mentioned. Dreary as the room seemed, I was glad to have a place which I could call my own; and having rather a taste for strange and out-of-the-way places, I closed with the terms of my landlord, and settled myself down in my new abode. By piecemeal I have become familiar with the history of the building, and of the dark transaction which brought it into ill repute; but it is too long a tale for the present, and may perhaps be reserved for some future number.

From the window I have an extensive prospect of weather-cocks and chimneys; and being within view of the City Hall and of the 'Five Points,' and within hearing of nineteen fire-bells, there is a comfort in my situation, Mr. Editor, which you probably cannot appreciate.

Opposite my dwelling, also, is a fire-engine, which is in a constant state of preparation for emergencies, to the great mystification of myself and of several small boys, which latter daily collect on the side-walks, and look with profound curiosity into the dim recesses of the engine-room. Never had engine such devoted attendants. Long and profound consultations are held respecting the health of the 'machine' by young men in pea-jackets; the wheels are greased three times a day, and about as often, the object of their solicitude is gently conducted around the block, by way of exercise, while scouting-parties of young men, in straight hats, with ringlets in front of their ears, solicitous for the welfare of the insurance companies, walk to the corners to see if they can discover indications of a fire in any direction. If none are

to be seen, they walk moodily back, and form a knot in front of the engine-house. The last fire is then talked over, and the merits of each 'machine' are discussed. I am sorely afraid, from what I overhear, that our city is but scurvily provided with fire-engines, as it seems by their conversation that every 'machine' in the city, except their own, is utterly useless, and not a fire has taken place, whose extinguishment is not owing to the superior merits of their engine, and the superior energy of its followers.

I have no influence in high quarters, or I would certainly recommend this particular company to the peculiar notice of the corporation; for I think that something should be done for these public benefactors; and I am somewhat surprised, after all their usefulness, that no body should make honorable mention of it except themselves.

The evil repute of my dwelling is a sure protection against all intrusion; and from having lived here so long without injury, the neighbors begin to look at me askance; and seem to think that one who can remain unscathed amidst the terrors of the haunted house, is himself no better than he should be.

For this reason, I have formed but two acquaintances. The first is a small dog of the neighborhood, who seems to have no owner, and who, as a great favor, manages to drop in about meal-times. I suspect him of being a mongrel, for he is a long-bodied fellow, with a broad chest, remarkably short fore-legs, set wide apart, and slightly bowed outward; and as he sits in front of me, he is not unlike one of those old-fashioned andirons which we sometimes meet with in country kitchens. He has a long and stiff tail, which he generally carries like a flag-staff, at right angles to his body, and has a grave and melancholy cast of countenance; but notwithstanding, I strongly suspect that he is an arrant

knave; for from my window I have occasionally detected him in acts of larceny, which give me but a poor opinion of his morals, and which, long since, would have utterly ruined the reputation of a dog of less devout exterior. However, a lonely old man like myself can pardon many things in a friend, though that friend be but a dog; but it *does* appear suspicious that he should invariably drop in at meal-time. It sometimes seems to me that he has no better opinion of me than the rest of the neighbors; and being a dissolute fellow himself, has set me down for one of the same kidney.

In making his visits, he always pauses at the door of the room, and throwing his head on one side, with one eye partly closed, seems engaged in calculating my height in feet and inches, after which, he stalks solemnly across the threshold, and seats himself directly in front of me, waiting to be noticed.

The other acquaintance of whom I spoke, is a bright-faced little boy, about ten years of age, who, in spite of the terrors of the dwelling, breaks in upon my solitude, and during the short time that he remains here, the whole place assumes an air of cheerfulness. He is a glad-eyed little fellow, with a merry laugh, that seemed to gush out from the very bottom of his heart: he is full of curiosity, asking a thousand questions, and will sit by the hour listening to stories of my past life. At first his visits gave great offence to the dog, who immediately became particularly assiduous in his attentions; but finding that the boy did not drop in at meal-times, he has become reconciled to his company, and even permits him to pat him on the head; though, notwithstanding all his deference to me, I doubt whether even *I* could venture to meddle with that tall upright mast which he calls his tail.

It is strange that a friendship should thus spring up between a young child just bursting into life, and surrounded by gay anticipations, and a gray-headed man, whose dream is over ; and who, while he listens to the hopes and prospects of his young companion, feels that, with every year of his life, one by one, they will vanish, to brighten his journey no more. I have often thought, as I listened to his joyous voice, of the troubles and trials that must await him, when he goes forth to join in the great struggle of life ; of his bitterness of heart, as friend after friend is missed from his accustomed place ; of the reverses which he must meet ; of the treachery he must experience, where he looks for friendship ; of coldness where he looks for love ; and of the deep disappointments which lurk about his path, until I gradually see his open and confiding nature growing more and more morose ; his gentle disposition gathering in its energies, and nerving them for strife ; and the warm, bright heart which now only answers to the gushes of love and joy, damming up its affections, and hardening itself to stand the brunt of the world. It is melancholy to think that these things must be ; but it is the course of nature. The flowers of spring which unfold their beauties to hail the young year, wither at the scorching sun of summer, and yield their places to others of a sterner growth ; until the unrelenting rigor of winter comes on, and leaves all in darkness and desolation.

I however must bring this letter to a close. It was my intention, Mr. Editor, to have entered more at length into details respecting myself ; but, with the garrulity of age, I have rambled on, without reflecting that I might be intruding upon the patience of another, and that my morbid feelings are matters of little interest to any except myself —. I am suddenly interrupted by an alarm of fire. The nineteen fire-bells are ringing ; the engine opposite has thundered up

the street ; its 'company' are yelling like Bedlamites ; a train of ragged boys are turning the corner, in full cry : several small curs have become quite clamorous ; and my own acquaintance, the dog, awakened by the din, after uttering a loud bark of surprise, has scampered at full gallop from the room, and is now racing down stairs as if he had ten legs instead of four. It is one of my rules never to miss seeing a fire ; so I must bid you farewell ; and perhaps, at some future time, I may enter more at length into the details of the life of

JOHN QUOD.

IN my last communication, Mr. EDITOR, I mentioned that I occupied a house which had once been the scene of a fearful deed, had gradually been shunned of all, and gained an evil name. With that strange zest for the fantastic which seems to have clung to me from my birth, the very circumstance which prejudiced others against it, found it favor in my eyes. The spectral and solitary chambers, the long and gloomy passages, the creaking stairs, the dark and sepulchral basements, all gave it an air of wild, yet to me, fascinating mystery ; and I have sat by the hour and listened to the wind, as it wailed through the dark entries ; and to the house itself, which seemed to moan like some old and decrepit human being. At such times, I cannot overcome a feeling of superstition. I people the place with phantoms of those who lived here before me, and who now are dead ; the voice of the sighing blast sounds like the whispered sorrows of their troubled spirits ; and as my mind wanders on, until it rests upon the last bloody act which consigned the house to solitude, I confess that a strange feeling of fear creeps

over me. In moments like these, I am obliged to throw open the window, and look out upon the calm, clear sky, and listen to the hum of the living world, before I can divest myself of these dreary fancies. I am now become familiar with all the crannies and hiding-places within its walls, and begin to relish the solemn silence which sleeps in its deserted rooms. The profound and somewhat superstitious veneration with which I am regarded by the neighbors, begins to please my fancy; and I am amused at the awe with which a group of small boys will collect on the opposite side of the street, and watch me, as I sit at the open window during the fine afternoons.

Shortly after establishing myself here, I set to work to trace out the history of the house. During the whole time that I have been thus engaged, several persons have cordially volunteered their aid. In particular, I am much indebted to a small gentleman, with green spectacles and thin legs, who is attached to the police of the city, and who heard the whole matter detailed at second-hand by a distinguished constable. Other facts I gleaned from a fat lady who sells vegetables at a corner near me; and being a great gossip, she told me the whole story while I was purchasing a bunch of radishes.

No sooner was it noised abroad that I was engaged in ferreting out the history of the murder, than information of all kinds came pouring in upon me; much that was useful, and some that I cared nothing about. In particular, I remember a gentleman in a snuff-colored suit, who stopped me in the street and inquired if I were Mr. Quod, and if I were engaged in writing the history of the haunted house. On my replying in the affirmative, he thrust his hand in his pocket, produced a large red pocket-book, and taking from it a paper, which he placed in my hand, 'There, Sir,' said he, 'there!—you could never have got along without *that*! It's an epi-

taph which I wrote on the murderer. Say nothing about it; it's a present — altogether a present. You may use it as you please; though, if the history is ever in print, I think it would not be amiss to put it in the title-page, then intersperse it once or twice in the course of the work, and finally bring it in with a grand flourish just over the 'FINIS.' Gad! Sir, how it will make the thing sell! I'll buy ten copies myself.' As soon as he gave me an opportunity, I endeavored as delicately as possible to excuse myself, smoothing over the refusal as well as I could. He looked at me in blank amazement, and without saying another word, took the paper from my hand, replaced it in his pocket-book, which he carefully deposited in the bottom of his breeches pocket; and then giving me a compassionate glance, he tapped his forehead, and nodding to himself, as if to intimate that all was not right there with me, walked off.

From the several authentic sources just mentioned I have collected the sad facts connected with my dwelling. They form a long story, and I have felt a strong interest in tracing out their tangled course. A short, abrupt detail would be but a dull affair, so I have dressed it up, divided it into chapters, and present it as you find it in the following pages.

JOHN QUOD.

THE ATTORNEY.

CHAPTER I.

A FEW years since, in that festering neighborhood which lies to the north-east of the City Hall stood a huge wooden building, whose great height and dilapidation gave it a menacing appearance to passers-by. Its exterior was faded and bleached by time and storm; and from neglect and decay, the upper stories had settled and projected forward; so that in the dim nights, when its tall outline stood relieved against the sky, it looked like a gaunt giant, bent with age and decrepitude. High, narrow windows, in many places broken or begrimed with the dust of years, admitted a faint uncertain light into the unfurnished rooms, the walls of which were dark and discolored, and hung with cobwebs. Occupants it once had; and the time had been when this old house had held up its head and lorded it over its more humble neighbors: but that time was gone by; and now it was the home only of the spider and the rat. There was however one exception. This was an attorney, who had a suite of offices at the end of a long, dark passage on the second floor. He was the only human tenant of the house, and even he confined himself to his own portion of it. He

never ventured in the upper stories ; and except for the purpose of going in or coming out, visited no other part than his own rooms. There were dark rumors concerning him, and many shunned him as they did his house. It is with him however that we have to do ; and the opening scene of our tale is in the two dim apartments which he then tenanted.

His age must have been forty, though the deep furrows which ploughed his high, narrow forehead, and the haggard and wasted look of his face, might have added ten years to his appearance. His eyes were deep-set and glittering, of that jetty, opaque character which seem to emit their brilliancy from the surface, and to enable them to peer into the secrets of every one, without reflecting any of their own. He was under the middle size, and of that wiry make which indicates great powers of endurance rather than positive bodily strength. Piles of loose papers were scattered carelessly on a table at his side, and several open law-books, which appeared to have been in recent use, were lying on different chairs about him. In the recesses of the office were huge cases of pigeon-holes, filled with the dust-covered papers of ancient, hopeless, and perhaps long-forgotten law-suits. Book-cases of dingy volumes were ranged against the walls ; massive folios were piled in corners of the room ; a profusion of torn papers were scattered over the carpet, and added not a little to its disorder. Upon the table stood a solitary candle, whose faint light scarcely dispelled the gloom in its immediate vicinity, and gave a murky, spectral appearance to the tall book-cases and furniture, indistinctly visible beyond.

For some time, the attorney sat with his thin fingers resting upon his knees, and his eyes fixed on the fire. By degrees, his brow grew anxious, and he compressed his lips

tightly, moving his head from side to side, and muttering to himself. At length he rose from his seat, and stepping to the door, locked it, trying the knob to see if it was secure. He then shaded the windows to prevent the light from being visible from without. This done, he took from a drawer a large brass key, and drew from an iron safe in the wall a bundle of papers, from which he selected one, and replacing the others, seated himself at the table. He unfolded the paper, and held it up to the light, narrowly examining the hand-writing, and particularly the signature attached to it. Apparently not satisfied with this, he got up and searched among other papers, until he found one bearing the same signature.

'T is very like!' said he, after a careful comparison of the two; 'he'd swear to it himself; and if I could but find some fool whose conscience is not over-scrupulous, this would *make* me! I must find that man—I *must* find him; ay, though the Devil himself bring him!'

A single knock at the door, upon the heels of his speech, so sharp and sudden that it seemed a response to it, so startled him, that he let the paper fall. The next moment he caught it up and folded it, without attending to the summons until he had replaced it in the safe, locked the door, and restored the key to its former place. The knock was repeated.

'Who's there?' he demanded.

'Come and see,' replied a harsh voice from without; and the knocking was renewed with an energy that said little for the patience of the person on the outside, and which threatened in a short time to leave no obstacle to his entrance.

'It's *you*, Wilkins, is it?' said he, in an altered tone. At the same time he unlocked the door, and admitted a tall, powerful man, clad in an overcoat of coarse, shaggy cloth, and with his hat slouched over his eyes. His face was pale

and haggard, his jaws large and prominent, and his eyes flashed from their dark caverns with sullen ferocity, like those of a hyena.

‘You are the very man I wanted,’ said the attorney, as he came in, at the same time shutting and locking the door.

His visitor strode up to the fire, and drawing his coat, with a slight shiver, more tightly over his shoulders, extended his hands towards the flame.

‘Put on more coal,’ said he; ‘this is a night to freeze one’s soul: and whatever I am *now*, you have made enough out of me to keep me from dying of cold.’

The attorney was apparently accustomed to such language, for he made no other reply than to request his visitor to be seated, while he replenished the grate. Then, seating himself, and turning to him, he said:

‘What’s on foot now? Whenever you darken this door, I know there’s something to be done. What is it?’

‘The same that I spoke to you about before—that girl,’ replied Wilkins, fixing his dark eyes on the pale, care-furrowed face of the other. ‘Am I to live for ever like a coupled hound; or can the chain be broken? Have you no remedy—no plan? Cannot the Devil, who is always at your right hand, help you to *something*?’

The attorney slightly elevated his eye-brows, and muttered something about ‘patience,’ though he watched the countenance of the other like a cat.

‘Patience!’ exclaimed Wilkins, rising, and speaking through his clenched teeth; ‘I *have* had patience; and what has it brought? It has reduced me from competence to what I am—a starving, wretched, and almost houseless beggar. It has worn me to the bone. It has destroyed my hopes, and now it is gnawing into my very soul. ‘Patience!’ Hark ye, Bolton, no more of *that*. If you cannot help me,

I can help myself—and I *will*. But it's hard to—to—— You know what.'

'To *what*?' asked the attorney, looking at him, as if in doubt of his meaning.

'*That*,' said Wilkins, opening his vest, and touching the handle of a concealed dirk.

'That!'

'Yes, *THAT*!' returned the visitor, savagely, setting his teeth, 'or shall I speak more plainly? To cut her throat. Do you understand me *now*?'

'Hush!' said Bolton, glancing suspiciously about the room, his thin features turning as rigid as if cut from marble. 'Don't speak so loud. No, no, you must not do *that*. That's murder; the punishment is death. Do you hear that? —*death*! I'll have no hand in it.'

The brow of the bolder villain darkened, and his eyes flashed fire. Leaning forward, and spreading out his fingers in the very face of the attorney, until they resembled the talons of a hawk, he slowly clenched them together, till they seemed buried in each other, and said in a voice which, though but a whisper, was distinctly audible: 'If you dare to fail me *now*, Bolton, or betray me, or show to others by word or whisper, or even by look, what I want or what you know, I'll place you where you'll rot—ay, rot! I'll——'

'Hist, George!' said the attorney, starting up, and seizing him by the arm; 'did you hear nothing?'

Both listened attentively.

'Nothing but the wind howling through this old rookery,' said Wilkins: 'Did you hear what I said?'

'Yes, I heard, and I'll not fail you. Why, George,' continued he, assuming an air of frankness that sat indifferently on him, 'are we not old friends—tried friends? Have I

not stood by you when none other would? You have not forgotten the last time — the note for a thousand dollars

‘No more of that,’ interrupted the other, impatiently.

‘We know each other *too well*,’ continued he, laying an emphasis on the last words, which seemed to indicate that the acquaintance, though intimate, had not increased his confidence. ‘But I did not come here to bandy words or to be reminded of old grievances; I came to get a remedy for new ones. The only question is, will you help me or not? This girl to whom I am married is in my way. I must be rid of her, and I have come to you to do it for me. Will you?’

Before Wilkins finished speaking, the attorney had recovered the habitual sneer that sat upon his thin lip, and replied quietly, and with an appearance of decision, which he felt sure would influence his companion:

‘If you mean murder, I will *not*. I have already risked much for you, and will risk more, but I’ll not risk my life. Besides, there are other means fully as good, and which do not lead to a halter.’

‘Well! what *are* they? The safer the better. But listen to me. I *will* be rid of that girl! by G—d, I will!—even though ——’ He paused; but the expression of bitter and vindictive hate which shone in every feature, and from which the attorney, steeped as he was in wickedness, quailed as from the glance of an evil spirit, and the quick motion of his arm, as if in the act of stabbing, explained his purpose.

‘It must not be—it must *not*!’ was the reply, in a tone which had lost much of its former confidence. ‘There are other ways, and they must be thought of. A divorce will leave you as free as you can desire. Do you wish to be rid only of *her*, or of the *knot*?’

'Of both! of both! If ever man loathed woman, I loathe her. There is but one thought in life; there is but one dream when my eyes are closed, and that is of hatred; and there is but one person in that thought and dream, and that is ~~her~~!' ^{she}

'This is a sad affair indeed,' said the attorney.

'Sad!' said Wilkins, drawing his chair more closely to that of the lawyer, and speaking in a whisper; '*sad!* — it's dreadful; it's wearing away my life. Bolton, if you could but look into this bosom and see its bitterness, hard, callous as you are, even *you* would shudder. There are moments when it seems as if all the devils in hell had taken possession of me. Yet I have strange fits of weakness too. I'll tell you what I did the other night. I had thought and thought on this one subject; and it *would* keep running into my head, that if *she* were out of the way, how well I could get on. It was in my own room, at midnight; and there she lay, in a deep sleep, the bed-clothes thrown partly down, and her throat bare. I know not how it was, but I found myself stealing to the bed with this dirk in my hand, and I held the point within an inch of her bosom. At that moment she turned in her sleep and said, 'Dear George, God bless you!' Curse me if I could strike! I slunk back from the bed, and blubbered like a boy, for I felt strange feelings at work, which I have not had for many a day. I'd rather not spill blood if any thing else can be done. Can't we send her abroad? You know, if she is out of the way, there's nothing between me and the widow. Once let me get her fortune, and you shall not be the loser by it.'

'Can she prove the marriage?'

'Beyond a doubt.'

'How long have you been married?' inquired Bolton.

'Two years.'

‘And is she true to you? — true beyond suspicion?’ asked the lawyer, looking at him significantly.

‘True as steel. Why, man, will you believe it? — in spite of all, she loves me!’

‘Ah!’ said the attorney, in a dissatisfied tone, ‘that’s bad. If it were not so, and she had another lover, *and it could be proved* —— (he spoke slowly, and with great meaning in his looks,) the Court of Chancery would grant a divorce, and you would be free.’

‘Free! free!’ exclaimed Wilkins, springing from his seat, as one from whom a great weight had just been lifted; ‘Free! great God! let me be free once again, and I will be a different man — an honest one.’

The attorney smiled, and although he said nothing, there was something in the calm, sarcastic curl of his lips that stung Wilkins to the soul, and he turned fiercely upon him.

‘Ay, I repeat it — an honest man. What have you to say against it?’

‘Nothing,’ said Bolton, drawing toward him a piece of paper, and writing on it; ‘there’s what I must have, before I meddle in the matter.’

Wilkins took it and read: ‘Two thousand dollars down, and five thousand more when you get the widow.’

‘Bolton!’ said he, in a choked voice, ‘this is too bad. Two thousand dollars! I have not ten dollars in the world. I don’t know what your drift is,’ said he, suddenly stopping, and looking steadily in the face of the lawyer, ‘but you have a d —— d suspicious look to-night; and there’s something in the wind, more than you let out: beware how you trifle with me! You should know me too well for *that*.’

Bolton attempted to smile, but only succeeded in producing a nervous contraction of the lip, at the same time turning deadly pale: at length he said, with some effort: ‘You

are right, I *have* something. Wait! I hear a noise in the passage.'

Taking the light, he unlocked the door, and traversed the dark entry which led to the lower floor. Nothing whatever was visible in the dim light, except the time-stained walls, and the broad chinks between the dilapidated planks. On reëntering the room, he went to each window and closed the shutters; after which, he made a general survey of the office.

'There's no body; it was all fancy,' said he, replacing the light on the table. 'Now,' he added, 'I will speak plainly. I have that in my mind which you have on yours; a plan to mend my fortune. Assist me, and I will assist you, without fee or reward. Swear to keep my secret, and I will swear to keep yours.'

'What mischief's hatching now?' asked Wilkins, suspiciously.

'Swear first to keep the secret.'

'Well; here I swear ——'

'That will not do; I must have something more solemn.'

'Well, what do you want?' asked Wilkins, impatiently.

'Get on your knees, and with your hands raised to heaven, call down imprecations on your head, blight upon your prospects, and perdition to your soul, if you betray me. *Then* I'll believe.'

Without remark, and with a solemnity that struck awe even to the hardened heart of the man who incited him, Wilkins knelt, and with uplifted hands, and eyes turned toward the throne of the great Omnipotent, called down upon himself maledictions which made the blood of his listener curdle.

'Enough!' said Bolton, relieved by the conclusion of a ceremony so fearful. Drawing the key from the drawer, and once more unlocking the iron safe, he took from it the paper

which had been so hastily deposited there, and spread it on the table.

'Here,' said he, hurriedly putting a pen in the hand of the other, as if afraid of his resolution giving way, 'just sign that; put your name there. I'll explain afterward.'

'What is it?' asked Wilkins, holding the pen exactly as it was placed in his hand, and looking at the attorney instead of the paper. 'Before a man puts his name to a thing like this, he likes to know what it is.'

'Merely a will,' said Bolton, nervously; 'only a will.'

'A will! Whose?—mine?'

'No; of an old friend of mine, John Crawford. I want you to put your name as a witness to its execution.'

Wilkins regarded him for some moments with a perplexed expression, but gradually light seemed to break in upon his mind.

'Ah! I see; you are helping him take care of his property, and you want me to witness it before he has even put his own name to it. I suppose I may read it, to make sure it isn't my own,' said he, running his eye over the paper: 'Natural daughter, Ellen Crawford; five thousand—all the rest, residue, and remainder;' umph! 'both real and personal—my valued friend, Reuben Bolton—sole executor—subscribed, sealed, declared, and published——' 'Bolton,' said he, lowering the paper, 'you *are* a d——d scoundrel!'

'Perhaps so,' replied the attorney, shrugging his shoulders, 'but what are *you*?'

'What want and suffering have made me. *You* have not even that excuse.'

'Perhaps not. You know now the terms on which I will assist you. John Crawford was seized with apoplexy this morning; before to-morrow he will be in his coffin; and this will must be made and witnessed before then. I can

imitate his signature so that he would swear to it himself. I will put it at the end of this, and you must witness it.'

'Well, what then?' demanded Wilkins, suspiciously; 'suppose the old man dies: what is to be done next?'

'Little or nothing; merely swear that you saw him sign it—a few other trifling matters; few or no questions will be asked; a mere form. It will be completed in five minutes, and you will get the widow for nothing.'

'Nothing! Only a false oath, and risk of being entertained at public expense. Do you call that *nothing*? However, I'll do it,' said he, speaking in a clear, decided tone. 'But the girl—will she be quiet?'

'What can she do? Will she not be penniless?'

'Not exactly. There's a small legacy of five thousand, which will keep the life in a pretty long law-suit; and if she should happen to be litigious——'

'Curse it! I never thought of that!' exclaimed Bolton, striking his hand forward with an air of vexed impatience, and taking one or two hasty steps.

'Perhaps,' suggested Wilkins, 'the old gentleman intended to make a later will without the legacy.'

'Yes, yes, so he did,' said Bolton, laughing, and catching eagerly at the suggestion. 'We'll do it for him, and you'll witness it?'

'Ay, if you'll unfetter me,' replied Wilkins.

'It's a bargain,' said the attorney, striking his hand into the open palm of the other; and thus was their iniquitous compact sealed.

As if by consent, both now seemed to think the conference concluded.

'Be here to-morrow evening at ten; and in the meantime gather up all that will throw suspicion on your wife. By-the-bye, the will requires two witnesses. Can you find an-

other equally trusty with yourself? I have a clerk who will excel one of these days, but he is too young yet, and would be nervous.'

Wilkins pondered a moment; at length he said: 'I know the very man; sharp, shrewd, without conscience, and with nerves like iron. But he is poor, and has no widow in his eye. You must pay *him* in ready money.'

'Leave that to me. And now I must spend the rest of the night in helping my old friend to dispose of his property. Ha! ha! ha!'

'Ha! ha! you are a deep one!' said Wilkins, taking up his hat. To-morrow night at ten. Good-night!'

The attorney listened to his steps as they echoed along the passage until they died away; then carefully locking the door, he lighted another candle, and addressed himself to his task.

CHAPTER II.

It was a cold night, and as Wilkins emerged from the building into the street, he drew a long breath of pure air, as if it were refreshing once more to be free from the murky, stagnant atmosphere of that old house, and under the blue vault of the sky. Thoughts and plans came crowding thickly upon him as he strode on, and hopes and fears; and with them was mingled a lurking dread of the poor girl against whom he was plotting; a half-acknowledged fear of what she might do if driven to extremity; and above all, the whispering of his own conscience, which made a coward of him as he slunk through the dark streets. Skulking along like a felon, he made for one of the great thoroughfares, for he felt as if the crowd there would keep off his own thoughts.

It was still early in the evening, and the streets were thronged with that tide of population which, during the first hours after twilight, sets from the lower to the upper part of the town. None loitered except the sick, the weary and the homeless. Hundreds of those poor girls who spend the hours of daylight in the lower parts of the city in earning a pittance by tedious toil, were speeding like so many uncaged birds to the homes where there were glad faces to welcome them, and kind hands to smooth a pillow beneath their aching heads; or perhaps not a few craved but a place to cast down their work-worn frames to rest before another day of toil. Many a pale face and blighted form was among that crowd, and many a tottering limb and trembling hand; eyes that should have been bright were dimmed with prema-

ture suffering, and features that should have worn the hue of health and been radiant with the gladness of youth were now wan and sunken, or illumined only by the sickly smile which flickers over the face of the invalid. Day after day they toiled on, but they felt that there was nothing in store for them; their childhood had had no joy, their youth no promise. Even hope was gone; and weary and heart-sick, they looked forward to but one place — the grave, where there was a calm and holy peace; where their toils would be ended for ever.

Mechanics and boys, with their tin kettles, in squads of five or six, were hurrying on, some in silence, others with loud merriment, but all bound to that single sacred spot — home.

Wilkins mingled with the throng, and made his way among them, sometimes pausing to listen to the remarks of the passers-by, and sometimes brooding over his own plans.

The street through which he was passing was that great artery of the city called the Bowery; and just above where it empties itself into the triangular opening known as Chatham Square, he turned off into a street on the eastern side of it.

The dwellings in this neighborhood were of the meaner kind, built chiefly of wood, with patched and broken windows, here and there repaired with paper, or by the introduction of an old hat or a pair of tattered inexpressibles. Throughout the whole there was an odd mixture of comfort and penury, and occasionally a faint effort at gentility in defiance of poverty: but in most cases, in the bitter struggle between human vanity and human want, stern necessity had got the upper hand.

A front room on a level with the street, in a mean house, in the part of the city just described, was Wilkins's home.

It was small and scantily furnished. A rag carpet, a small looking-glass, a deal table, a bed, and a few rush-bottom chairs were all that it contained ; but with all its poverty it had an air of cheerfulness. A bright fire burnt merrily on the cleanly-swept hearth, and window-shades of painted paper, such as is used for walls, served to shut out the cold and to impart an air of greater comfort. Every thing bespoke extreme poverty, combined with that rarest of all its accompaniments — cleanliness.

The only tenant of this room was a girl of scarcely more than nineteen, who sat at the table repairing some article of man's apparel. There was an expression of hopeful anxiety in her large dark eye, and a lighting-up of features which had once been beautiful, but were now rather thin and sharp in outline, and a nervous, restless motion of the body, and a hasty glance at the door as each successive step approached ; and a corresponding expression of disappointment as it receded.

How sure, yet how indefinable is the certainty with which we recognize a familiar footstep ! For half an hour at least, the girl had feverishly watched and listened. At last came a quick, firm step. She started to her feet, and had scarcely time to exclaim, 'That's him !' when the door opened, and Wilkins strode in.

'I knew it was you !' exclaimed the girl joyously, running up to him, and offering to take his hat.

'Well, what if you did ?' replied he, jerking the hat from her hand, and throwing it on a chair. 'Let my coat alone, will you ? I am able to take it off myself. Do you think that I am as helpless as you, who can do nothing without being waited on ? Get me some supper, and don't trouble me ; I'm not in the humor.'

'I did not mean to offend you, George,' said she, shrink-

ing from the angry yet irresolute eye that met hers ; ' indeed I did not. Are you ill, George ? '

' Get me some supper. Am I to stand starving here, while you, who take care never to feel hungry yourself, pour your clatter in my ears ? '

The poor girl had not eaten since morning, lest there should not be sufficient left in the scanty larder to furnish a meal for her husband, for such was the relationship between them ; but she said not a word, but shrank back, and set about preparing the meal.

' Who's been here since morning ? ' demanded Wilkins, seating himself in front of the fire, and thrusting his feet in a proximity to the flame which showed more desire of heat than consideration for shoe-leather. ' I suppose *that* Jack Phillips ; he's here for ever. '

' No, only your friend Higgs ; he stopped but for a moment, to inquire when I expected you, and did not even come in, ' replied the girl, busying herself in arranging the table.

With a sulky growl, the import of which was lost in a contest between his voice and teeth, Wilkins sank back in his chair, and gazed in the fire, occasionally casting stealthy and irresolute looks at his wife. Several times he opened his lips as if to speak ; but the words shrank back, and he contented himself with poking the fire, and giving vent to a few indistinct mutterings.

' Curse it ! ' he exclaimed at last, with a strong effort, ' have you nothing to tell me ? When did Higgs call here ? '

' About an hour ago. '

' Well, why could n't you say that at first ? If it had been that fellow, Jack Phillips, I should have heard it soon enough. He's here too much. '

' Well, George, ' said she, mildly, ' if you wish it, we can

refuse to let him in. I thought he was a friend of yours, and for that reason I ——'

'Fell in love with him,' interrupted Wilkins, with a sneer. 'You see, I know all about it.'

Lucy turned short round, without saying a word, and fixed her dark eyes upon him with a look of surprise and incredulity that completely over-mastered the dogged gaze which it encountered.

'No, George,' said she, with a faint laugh, 'not *that*; but it's ill jesting on such subjects: do n't say it again.'

'But I *will* say it, and I *do*! 'Jesting!' By G —! I mean what I say — every word of it!

'No, no, George,' exclaimed she, with an hysterical laugh, and catching hold of his arm: 'you do not — you *cannot*. I know it was only a joke; but you looked so very strange! It was *only* a joke — *was n't* it?'

'Was it?' muttered he, grinding his teeth, though without raising his eyes to hers; 'we'll see that! Give me my supper, for I must be out. Do n't keep me waiting.'

The girl made no reply, but releasing his arm, and turning her back toward him, hastily dashed her hand across her eyes, and went on with her preparations in silence. This lasted about five minutes, Wilkins gazing now at the floor, and now stealing a look at his wife.

'The supper is ready,' she said, at length. Wilkins rose, and dragging the chair to the table, seated himself, and began to eat voraciously, without noticing his wife, who sat at the opposite side, eyeing him with suspicion and fear. Once or twice their eyes met, and Wilkins's dropped beneath hers.

'What are you staring at?' demanded he, angrily; 'can't a man eat without having every mouthful counted?'

The girl rose, and taking a stool from the corner, drew it near the fire, and seated herself with her back to him.

‘Did Higgs say what he wanted?’ asked Wilkins.

‘No; he only asked if you were in; and when I told him you were not, he went off.’

‘I suppose he wanted money. I must see him. Do you know where he went?’

‘He said he would wait at Rawley’s, and that you would know where that was.’

Without farther words, Wilkins left the table, and put on his shaggy overcoat: jerking his hat on his head, and taking from the corner a stick, something between a cane and a bludgeon, he sallied out.

‘Will you return soon, George?’

Wilkins slammed the door behind him, without reply, and walked off.

His wife stood until the sound of his footsteps died away, her lip quivering, the large tears in her eyes, her hand pressed painfully against her breast, and her breath coming short and with difficulty. The struggle was but for a moment. She threw herself in a chair, bent her head down upon the table, and wept long and bitterly.

CHAPTER III.

ON leaving the house, Wilkins directed his steps down the Bowery to Chatham-street, crossing which, he struck through that portion of the town lying between Chatham and Centre-streets, and notorious as the abode of crime and infamy. Every thing about him bore the mark of corruption and decay. Houses with unglazed sashes, unhinged doors, roofless and crumbling away beneath the hand of time, were leaning against each other to support themselves amid the universal ruin. Unlike the rest of the city, there was no life, no bustle; all was stagnant: its inhabitants seemed buried in a living grave. Crowds of miserable objects, the wrecks of human beings, were loitering about the dismal holes which they called their homes; some, shivering on the side-walks, were nestling together to steal warmth from each other's carcasses; some, bloated and half stupefied with hard drinking, went muttering along, or stopped to brawl with others like themselves. Young females, too, with hollow cheeks and hungry eyes, were loitering among the herd. Many of them had been born to nothing better; but there were those among them who once had friends who had loved them, and had looked forward to a future without a shadow: but they had come to this; they had broken the hearts of those who would have cherished them, and had drunk of crime and woe to the dregs.

Hardened as Wilkins was, he shuddered and grasped his bludgeon more tightly as he hurried through this gloomy spot. Stifled screams and groans, and sounds of anger and

blasphemy burst upon his ears, mingled with shouts of mirth; and he observed figures shrinking in the obscure corners of the buildings as he passed, and watching him with the cautious yet savage eye of mingled suspicion and fear; for he was in the very heart of the region where thieves and cut-throats were skulking to avoid the vigilance of the police, and had common lot with the penniless and homeless who came there only to die. With a feeling of relief he emerged from this doomed spot, and came to a quiet street. It was growing late in the night, and it was nearly deserted, and so silent that his footsteps echoed on the pavement as he walked along. As he turned a corner, a solitary female, squalid and in rags, endeavored to stop him, and spoke a few words, half in jest, half in supplication. Utter destitution had driven her forth to seek in sin the means of satisfying her craving hunger. Wilkins shook her off with a curse, and walked steadily on. The girl uttered a faint laugh, and looked after him until he turned a corner. 'He does not know what hunger is,' muttered she. Drawing her scanty clothing more closely about her, and crouching on the stone step of a large house, she leaned her head against the door-post, and wept.

Traversing several narrow streets, and turning at one time to the right and at another to the left, Wilkins at last came to a mean-looking house, having a small sign over the door, indicating that it was a tavern, and with a number of illuminated placards in the windows, intimating that lodgings were to be had, and that various liquors might be purchased at the moderate sum of three cents a glass. In addition to these, a number of more modest notices were placed in the same window, for the benefit of the smoking community, as well as of the drinking.

Wilkins pushed roughly past two or three persons, and

entered a dingy room, strongly impregnated with the fumes of tobacco and spirits, and enveloped in a cloud of smoke. It was filled with persons who looked as if they would not hesitate to ease a pocket, or, if it were necessary, to extend their civility so far as cutting a throat. Some were savage, silent and sullen; others, under the influence of what they had drunk, were humorous and loquacious: some, steeped in intoxication, were lying at full length upon wooden benches; others were leaning back in their chairs against the wall, saying nothing, but blowing out clouds of tobacco smoke. The only one of the whole group who aspired to any thing like sobriety was a small man in a shabby suit of black, who sat in a corner, endeavoring to expound some knotty point of politics to a gentleman who was blinking at him from an opposite corner with an air of deep conviction, arising either from his being thoroughly impressed by the force of the argument, or profoundly involved in liquor.

In the midst of this disorderly throng sat Mr. Rawley, keeping guard over a row of shelves occupied by a small congregation of decanters, each one being decorated with a small medal, which silently hinted to the by-standers the kind of liquor to be found in the bowels of the vessel. Mr. Rawley looked gravely around on his set of 'reg'lars,' as he termed his steady customers, and smiled approvingly at each successive drain upon the vitals of his bottles. He showed in his own person that he approved of enjoying the blessings of life, for he was a stout man, with a face wide at the bottom, and tapering up like an extinguisher, and in the midst of it was a solemn, bulbous nose, somewhat red at the end, possibly owing to Mr. Rawley's being afflicted with a propensity of smelling at the stoppers of his own decanters. At his right hand stood a large white bull-dog, who seemed to have been

squeezed into a skin too small for his body, by reason of which operation his eyes were forced out like those of a lobster. He had the square head and chest of a dog of the first magnitude ; but probably to accommodate the rest of his body to the scanty dimensions of his skin, he suddenly tapered off from thence to the other extremity, which terminated in a tail not much thicker than a stout wire. He was, as Mr. Rawley observed, a 'reg'lar thorough-bred bull,' and acted as under bar-keeper to his master ; and when Wilkins entered, was standing with his eyes fixed in the corner occupied by the argumentative gentleman before mentioned, as if he felt that he could take a very effective part in the discussion, but had some doubt as to the propriety of the step.

As soon as Wilkins entered, the dog walked up to him, and very deliberately applying his nose to his knee, smelt from thence downward to the instep, around the ankle, and up the calf to the place of beginning.

'Come away, 'Bitters'!' exclaimed Rawley. 'Let the gentleman alone — will you?'

'Bitters' looked up at Wilkins, to satisfy himself that there was no mistake as to the fact of his belonging to that class of society, and then walked stiffly back, like an old gentleman in tight small-clothes — but made no remark.

Wilkins noticed neither the dog nor his master, but looked around the room.

'I do n't see Higgs. Is he *there*?' asked he, nodding his head toward an inner chamber.

'No ; he's up stairs,' said Mr. Rawley.

'Alone?'

'I believe so. He wanted paper, and took that, and a candle, and went off.'

‘Does he stop here to-night?’

‘If he *forks* first; but,’ continued he, tapping his pocket, ‘I think his disease *here* is of an aggravated natur’.

Wilkins left the room, and ascending a narrow staircase, which creaked under his weight, came to a dark passage. A light shining from beneath a door at the farther end of it guided him to the room that he sought, which he entered without ceremony. Seated at a table, engaged in writing, was a man of about forty, dressed in a shabby suit, buttoned closely up to the throat, to conceal either the want of a shirt, or the want of cleanliness in that article of apparel; and a high stock encasing his neck, probably for the same purpose. He was rather below the middle height, with a full, broad forehead, sharp gray eyes, and features rather delicate than otherwise, with the exception of the jaw, which was closed and compressed with a force as if the bone of it were made of iron.

The face altogether was common-place; but the jaw bespoke nerve, resolution and energy, all concealed under a careless exterior, and an affectation of extreme levity. On the table was a hat, in which was a dirty cotton handkerchief, a newspaper, two cigars, and part of a hard apple, with which last article the person just described occasionally regaled himself, to fill up those intervals of time when his writing had got the start of his ideas.

As Wilkins entered, he looked up; then pushing back his chair and dropping his pen, with some show of alacrity, came forward and extended his hand.

‘How are you, my old ’un?’

‘Well,’ replied Wilkins, laconically. ‘What brings you here? what are you writing?’

‘A billy-dux,’ said Higgs, gravely, ‘to one as virtuous as fair. But it’s a secret which I can’t reveal.’

‘I do n’t want you to ; I came to see you on a matter of business, one of importance to — to many persons, and one in which you must take a part.’

‘Ah ! what is it ?’

‘Who ’s in the next room ?’

‘I do n’t know. It’s empty, I believe.’

‘Go and see ; and look in all the rooms, and be quiet as you do so.’

Higgs, taking the light, went out, and Wilkins took the opportunity to open a long closet, to see that no listeners were there, and then seated himself at the table.

‘All empty, except the farthest one. Tipps is there, dead drunk,’ said Higgs, reëntering the room, and closing and locking the door after him. He then drew a chair directly in front of Wilkins, and placing a hand on each knee, looked in his face.

‘Can you keep a secret ?’ asked Wilkins, after a long scrutiny, and looking full into two eyes that never blenched.

‘Can’t you tell ? You ought to be able to.’

‘Will you swear ?’

‘What’s the use ? It do n’t bind any stronger than a promise. Out with it. I’ll keep a close mouth.’

‘Well, then,’ continued Wilkins, watching him sharply, to see the effect produced by his communication, and at the same time drawing his chair closer, and speaking in a whisper, ‘suppose you knew of a murder, and there was a reward of a thousand dollars offered, and you knew the man who did it, and could give him up, and could get the money, all without risk to yourself ; would you do it ?’

‘No. I’ll have no man’s blood on my head,’ replied the other ; and pushing back his chair, he took up the light, and held it full in Wilkins’s face. ‘Is that so ?’

‘No,’ returned Wilkins, apparently relieved.

Well, what have you got to tell ?'

'Suppose,' continued the other, 'the crime was a forgery, and the reward the same ; what would you do ?'

'That's only imprisonment. I'd give him up.'

'But what if you were paid *not* to do so ?' said Wilkins, eagerly.

'Then I would n't,' said Higgs, quietly.

'What if you were paid to have a hand in it ? — would you do it ?'

'What is the pay ?' demanded the other, instantly catching his meaning.

'A thousand dollars.'

'I'll do it.'

'And will not let it out ?'

'No.'

'Nor turn State's evidence ?'

'No.'

'But suppose the person to be wronged is a girl, young, handsome, and unprotected ?'

'Mr. Wilkins,' said Higgs, assuming an air of decision, and thrusting one hand in his breeches pocket, while he extended the other toward him, 'I'd cheat her all the same. For a thousand dollars I'd cheat my own mother !'

'Enough ! that's settled. You are engaged. And now for another. Suppose you had a friend who is in trouble, and wants your assistance ?'

'Well ——'

'And relies on you, and must go to hell without you ?' Wilkins paused, and scrutinized the hard, stony face that almost touched his own. 'And suppose that friend,' continued he, slowly, and with apparent effort, 'had a wife who stood in his way, who prevented him from rising in the world, and who took advantage of his absence from home

to welcome another; and suppose, if that could be proved, he could get a divorce, and marry a fortune, and make you a present of a thousand or two?—do you think you could prove that first wife's crime?’

‘Lucy?’ said Higgs, inquiringly.

Wilkins nodded.

‘I supposed so. It's been a long time coming to a head. I expected it months ago.’

‘You will prove what I told you?’

‘It ain't true, though?’ asked Higgs, peering anxiously in the face of his friend.

‘No. But what of that?’

‘Nothing — only I wanted to know.’

‘Then you will prove it?’ reiterated Wilkins.

‘Of course I will. But, George,’ said Higgs, slowly, ‘I always liked Lucy. There's not her like on earth.’

‘Hell and furies!’ exclaimed Wilkins, starting to his feet, and clenching his fists. ‘If I do not get the divorce, if I cannot shake her off by the law, I will by — something else!’ As he spoke, he dashed his heavy hand against the table, as if it clutched a knife. ‘Will you help me?’

‘I will. Better *that* than murder; but you'll be the loser. Mark my words.’

‘I'll risk it,’ said Wilkins. ‘And now my business is ended; so good-night, and do not fail to be at my house to-morrow morning, at sunrise, and I'll tell you more.’

‘I will,’ was the reply, and Wilkins slammed the door after him.

When Mr. Higgs heard him descending the stairs, he took the apple from the hat, and carefully wiped it with the sleeve of his coat, and after turning it round several times, with his eye fixed on it as if searching for the most effectual spot to begin, he took a large bite, and resumed his pen

and his labors. Wilkins left the room, and strode rapidly down stairs into the bar-room, and was quitting the house, when he found his path obstructed by Bitters, who, being in doubt whether he had settled his reckoning, with an amiable smile which displayed a row of remarkably strong teeth, evinced an inclination to remonstrate against his leaving the premises.

‘Call off your dog, Rawley,’ said Wilkins, angrily, ‘or I’ll dash his brains out.’ As he spoke, he raised his heavy bludgeon. The eyes of the dog glowed like living coals, as the club rose in the air; but farther hostilities were arrested by the voice of the bar-keeper, who called the animal away. After giving Wilkins a look such as champions in the days of yore were in the habit of bestowing on each other when they pleasantly intimated the hope that they might meet at some future day, where there would be none to interrupt their pastime, Bitters walked stiffly off, as if laboring under a severe attack of rheumatism.

Wilkins paused no longer than to allow the dog to get out of his path, and then hurried off toward his own home.

CHAPTER IV.

TEARS to many bring relief ; but to the broken heart they only widen the wound : and when Lucy, after the departure of her husband, gave full vent to the bitter gush of grief, her tears did not lessen it. She thought of times past never to return ; of the happy hours of her childhood, and of those who had loved her then ; of the friends who had clustered about her ; of the bright fireside of her early home, and of the light-hearted group that assembled around it in the cold winter evenings. Yet she had quitted them all. She looked round the dimly-lighted room, with its scanty furniture and the meagre repast, which remained as Wilkins had left it. She had quitted all that her young heart had loved to follow *him*, to live thus — and to have that heart trampled on. ‘Well, no matter!’ thought she; ‘perhaps he was ill; and when he returns, a few kind words will make up for all.’ Even this thought brought a ray of comfort with it; and dashing the tears from her eyes, she rose to remove the things from the table. At that moment a step which she at once recognized as her husband’s sounded in the passage, and he entered the room.

His greeting was a rough one. Dashing his hat to the floor, and muttering something between his teeth, he dragged a chair to the centre of the room, stamped it heavily on the floor, and sat down opposite his wife.

‘Has any one been here? Holloa! what are you snivelling about?’ said he, taking her by the arm, and holding the candle full in her face.

'I am not well, George, indeed I am not,' said she, bending down and resting her forehead on his shoulder to conceal the tears that would gush out in spite of her.

'Thunder!' exclaimed he, starting to his feet with a violence that nearly threw her down; 'am I never to come home without being greeted in this way? Will you have done with this, I say?'

'There, there, George,' said she, in a choked voice; 'it's all over now. I'll not do so again.' There was a slight quivering of the lip, to conceal which she busied herself at the table: and Wilkins threw himself back in his chair, and watched her with moody looks. She removed the things and placed them in a cupboard in a corner of the room: then, throwing a knot of wood on the fire, she drew a chair beside her husband, and seating herself in it, took his hand.

I verily believe that the Devil sometimes takes up his abode in the heart of man; and that night he had made his quarters in that of Wilkins, or else the gentle, half timid, half confiding glance with which his wife looked up in his face, and the affectionate manner in which she wound her soft fingers around his hard, bony hand, would have softened his mood; but it did not. Griping the hand that rested in his until the girl cried out from pain, he flung it from him.

'Damnation! Can't a man sit a moment in peace, without being whimpered or worried to death! I wish to God you were where I got you from!'

The girl made no reply, but drew off to a far corner of the room and seated herself; but the evil spirit of Wilkins was now fully roused, and he followed her up.

'I repeat it,' said he, shaking his clenched fist over her head; 'I wish you were where I got you from!'

His wife cowered down in her seat, and kept her eyes fixed on the floor, without making any reply.

'Are you dumb?' shouted the miscreant, shaking her violently, 'or are you deaf? Do you hear what I say?'

'Yes, George,' was the scarcely articulate reply.

'Have n't you got an answer, then?' demanded he in a hoarse voice.

Lucy shook her head, and buried her face in her hands; but Wilkins caught her by both wrists, and by main strength held her up in front of him face to face.

'What answer have you to make?' demanded he fiercely. 'Answer me, I say.'

'Indeed, George, I have none, replied his wife, trembling so that she shook in his grasp; for in all his paroxysms of anger he had never before acted like this; 'Indeed, I do n't know what answer to make. I am sorry you want to be rid of me: my mother is in her grave; and I have now only you. I have few friends, and none to love me but you; the others are far off.'

'Does Jack Phillips live so *very* far off?' said Wilkins with a sneer.

'What do you mean?' demanded his wife, extricating her wrists from his gripe, and standing erect, and confronting him; 'what do you mean?'

'Oh! you do n't *know*, do n't you?'

'No, I do *not* know; but I suspect much — *all!*' said she, with an energy which surprised her husband, though it did not shake his purpose; 'and this I will say, that whoever attacks my name, be he foe or friend, or even husband, or dares to cast by word or sign a shade upon me, is a foul slanderer! A woman's fame is a thing that will not bear tampering with; and he is a villain who would throw the weight of a feather against it, and doubly so if he be one who should protect it!'

Wilkins's features fairly writhed with wrath. Seizing the

girl by the arm, he dragged her to the table, and striking his fist upon it with a force that made the candlesticks rattle, he asked : 'Do you dare deny it? — that you have met *him* in my absence — false-hearted as you are ! that you have seized occasions when I was away to dishonor me — to make yourself — I will not say what. Speak ! speak, I say ; do you dare deny it ?'

'I *do* !' replied the girl, confronting him, and returning his look without blenching ; 'I *dare* deny it, and I *do* ; and whoever invented this tale is a false-hearted liar, be it man or woman — I say so. Who is it ? Bring me to him ; place me face to face with him, and *then* let him dare to utter it. Who is it ?'

'You'll find out soon enough,' said Wilkins, savagely ; and he jerked her arm from him ; 'sooner than you want to.'

'No ! not sooner than *that*,' replied Lucy, again approaching him ; 'it never can be too soon. Now — here ! I am ready.'

'Keep off ! she-devil !' exclaimed Wilkins, in turn terrified by her wild eye and frenzied actions : 'keep off ; you had better.'

'I *will not*, until you tell me the name of the slanderer. Tell me, will you ?'

'Keep off, I say,' said Wilkins, retreating.

'I will not ! Tell me ! tell me !' repeated she, looking up in his face in supplication. Wilkins clenched his fist and struck her to the floor.

If ever there was a felon stroke it was *that* : and he felt it so ; for his arms fell powerless at his side, and he trembled at the outburst which he thought would follow : but it did not. Without cry or word Lucy rose from the floor, and holding her hair from her temples, looked him full in the eyes. Every drop of blood had deserted her face, and was

gathered about her heart. Her breath came thick and hard, and there was something terrible in the dark, dilating eye, as she paused for an instant and fixed it upon the wretched man who stood before her, cowering and conscience-smitten. She walked across the room and took her bonnet and shawl from a peg on which they were hanging.

‘Where are you going?’ at length asked her husband. The girl made no reply, but proceeded to tie the strings of her bonnet, and turned toward the door.

‘Where are you going at this hour?’ again asked Wilkins, walking toward her; but she waved him back.

‘God only knows! — but this is no longer a home for me.’ As she spoke, she rushed out. With disordered steps she ran along the dark streets. She did not heed the direction which she took, nor did she notice that persons, attracted by her appearance and excited manner, turned to gaze at her. There was that in her heart which deadened all external sense. Several times she was spoken to by those who, attracted by her beauty, augured ill of her character, by seeing her alone and unprotected at such an hour of the night; she heeded them not, but rushed on, guided only by the fierce impulses of a broken heart, until they left her. She traversed the damp streets until they grew more and more lonely: the busy stir of evening had gradually subsided; the weary and the wicked, the happy and the wretched, had long since gone to their beds, and the only sound that broke through the night-stillness was the melancholy clink of the watchman’s club upon the pavement, or the drowsy song of some midnight bacchanal, as he staggered home to sleep off his potations in nightmare dreams. To the poor girl there was no home; and after wandering about nearly the whole night, nature gave way; and sinking down on the steps of a large house, she fell into a swoon.

WHAT a dreary thing it is, Mr. EDITOR, to walk through the crowded street, and see smiles wreathing around bright faces, when they meet faces as bright as themselves ; glad eyes lighting up at the sight of those whom they love ; friend meeting friend with kind wishes and inquiries ; and then to look in upon your own lonely heart, and feel that none of these are for you. None in that crowd knew, as I lingered near them, that the threadbare old man at their elbow was loitering there only to hear a tone from the heart, although addressed to a stranger. But that is past ; and although at the commencement of my 'Correspondence' my friends were limited to a small boy and a dog of no great respectability, and my acquaintances to a testy gentleman with thin legs and green spectacles, and a woman who sells vegetables near me, yet I have suddenly grown into importance. I am looked up to by the neighbors as a great historian. The fame of my house is noised abroad. I see strangers stopping in front of it, and examining it with an air of mysterious interest ; and a small man, with a ragged coat and a dirty face, sat the whole of yesterday on the curb-stone opposite, making a sketch of it.

I have also received several written inquiries respecting my habits and history ; and my correspondence has increased to such an extent, that the postman claims me as an acquaintance, nods familiarly when we meet, and sometimes holds up a letter half a block off. There is something exceedingly pleasant and cheering in the expressions of good-will which run through some of these letters. I make it a rule, as far as I can, to answer them punctually ; but the two following having been sent without an address, before continuing my tale I trust that you will insert them with my reply.

‘OH! MY DEAR MR. QUOD!

‘Do n’t be frightened—though I am. You’ve mortally offended our lodger, Mr. Hotchkins, the gentleman in a snuff-colored suit, whose epitaph you refused. He vows he’ll be the death of you. He’s bought a bundle of quills, a bottle of ink, and a whole ream of paper—but no pistol; and he swears he’ll review you. I do n’t know what that means, but I suspect it’s some kind of murder; and Mr. Hotchkins is a dreadful man. All the children are afraid of him, and he *does* hate cats so! Ever since that piece of yours came out in print, he looks so very dreadful, that whenever I hear him unlock his room door, I run up into my own, and shut myself in until I hear him go out of the street door. And I dare n’t ask him for his board bill; and he owes me for two weeks, making four dollars; and for washing an odd stocking, a cotton handkerchief, and one shirt—one shilling; which is very cheap. And if you’d like it, Mr. Quod, I’ll do all your washing on the same terms; and if you ever think of changing your lodgings, I’ve a nice little room which will just suit you; and a dog just like the one you have; and he shan’t trouble you at meal-times; and your boy may come to see you whenever you like—I’m so fond of children! I would n’t dare to write this letter if Mr. Hotchkins had n’t gone out, for fear he’d find it out; he’s so knowing, and I’m so dreadful afraid of him. If I was in your place, I’d go straight to the police office and swear the peace ag’in him: *that* would bring him to his senses, if any thing would. Do n’t neglect my warning; and believe me,

‘Yours lovingly, ELIZA SMITH.’

‘P. S. Mending is extra.

E. S.’

The next letter is from a gentleman who appears to belong to that respectable fraternity ycleped ‘the Fancy:’

‘MR. JOHN QUOD, ESQ. : DEAR SIR :

‘Just inform me, will you, where that fellow Rawley lives. I know that dog of his’n, that Bitters. He’s my dog Slaughter, and that fellow must have stole him, and changed his name. There’s no mistake about it : there never was another so like Slaughter as that Bitters, except Slaughter’s own self ; and if ever I lay my eyes on him, (Rawley, I mean,) I’ll set my ten commandments on that red nose of his’n, which you say *smells* at the necks of decanters, though I think it *drinks* at ’em too !

‘That Slaughter is come of a first-rate stock. He’s out of Sleeping Beauty, and his sire was the celebrated bull-dog Murder, who was game to the very teeth—to the teeth, Sir ; and you’ll believe it, when I tell you how he died. They set him at a bull, and he took him just by the nose, and there he hung. No let go to *him* ! They pounded and beat him, but it was of no use : so at last those infatuated individuals determined to sacrifice that promising dog, merely for obeying the impulses of his natur’. First, they chopped off his tail, then his legs, then his body : but his head hung on until they forced open his jaws : but will you believe it, Sir ? — there was so much game in that animal, that his very *teeth* would n’t give up ; and when the head fell off, all them grinders remained sticking in the bull’s nose : and they was obliged to send for a celebrated dentist, and have ’em all extracted, at a dollar a tooth. So you see, Mr. Quod, what a famous stock he’s from : and if you’ll only tell me where that Rawley is, you’ll eternally oblige me ; and I’ll thrash Rawley, and send you a pup of the same breed.

‘Yours to the very marrow,

‘ISAAC SNAGG.’

In reply to the letter of Mr. Snagg, I can only say that I

cannot now inform him where Mr. Rawley resides. The events narrated in that part of the 'Correspondence' took place several years since. Mr. Rawley has absconded, and Bitters, who was then well stricken in years, is probably gathered to his fathers.

From the bottom of my heart I thank Mrs. Smith for the friendly caution against the machinations of her bloody-minded lodger. She may depend on it I will keep an eye on him, and in pursuance of her advice will consult my friend with green spectacles and thin legs, who being, as I have mentioned before, attached to the police office, is conversant with such matters, and no doubt can give me many salutary hints on the subject. As regards the latter part of Mrs. Smith's letter, I would mention, that my washing is under the superintendence of an elderly colored lady, from whom I am reluctant to take it at present: nor have I any intention of changing my quarters: but should I do so, Mrs. Smith may be assured that I will not forget the kindly feelings which dictated her letter; and if Mr. Hotchkins were out of the way, that I could no where feel happier than under the roof of one who, with the characteristic benevolence of her sex, has extended her arm to shelter from injury a stranger who had no other claim upon her than that given by age and sorrow.

JOHN QUOD.

CHAPTER V.

FOR more than an hour after the departure of his wife, Wilkins sat listening to every footstep that passed, in the expectation that she would return ; but by degrees the tread of the passers-by grew less and less frequent, and presently the deep tones of a neighboring church-bell, tolling the hour of midnight, rolled through the air, sounding in the stillness of the night like a knell. Wilkins sat in his chair and counted the strokes. 'One, two, three, four — five, six, seven, eight — nine, ten, eleven, twelve! — midnight!' said he, drawing a long breath, and looking stealthily around the room, 'and not home yet!' He went to the window, and, raising the paper curtain, looked out into the street. The night, which was clear at first, had become damp and misty, and the pavement was covered with a slimy mud. No one was stirring. The shops were all shut, and the street was pitchy dark, except in the immediate vicinity of a lamp, which diffused a sickly yellow light. He turned from the window, and going to the bed, threw himself upon it, and endeavored to sleep ; but the last look of his wife haunted him. He fancied her wandering alone, helpless and unprotected, through the dark streets ; he thought of her first greeting that evening ; of the kind and ever-bright heart which had cheered him in the early days of his marriage, when his prospects were better, and had clung to him but the more closely as they darkened. When he closed his eyes, the lids seemed to scorch his eye-balls ; and after tossing about for hours, he sprang up with a deep curse, and walked rapidly up and down

the room, in the vain hope of ridding himself of the fever of his own thoughts. He attempted to strike up a jovial song; but the sound of his own voice startled him into silence. Now the idea occurred to him that it must be near morning, and he went to the window and looked towards the east, in hopes of seeing the daylight glimmering in the sky: but all was dark. He listened for the striking of the clock. Never did time move so sluggishly; but at length it came: 'One, two, three — three o'clock! Three good hours to daylight! I can't sleep!' he muttered, looking at the bed: 'no, d—n it! I'll not lie there and be haunted by her. *Her!* I wonder where she is? Where! — what do I care? Have I not got what I wanted? Has n't she, of her own free will, deserted me? Ha! ha! ha! I'm in luck! How light my heart feels at my riddance!'

He paused, for he knew that he lied. He felt that he was a villain. He took up the light, went to a small glass, and perused his face, to see if a curse were not branded there. He gazed and gazed, until he fancied that he could trace the impress of every evil passion, stamped upon it as with a fiery seal, in characters which none could mistake. In a savage humor with himself and all the world, he clenched his teeth, and muttered: 'Well, it is written there; my every look says it; and by G—d, I'll not belie my own face! And now,' said he, tossing himself on the bed, 'I'll sleep.'

This time he was more successful; for soon his deep, heavy breathing, and his motionless position, showed that his feverish frame for a time at least was at rest.

The repose of the guilty is ever broken; and when the glad light of morning stole into his chamber, Wilkins rose unrefreshed. His eyes were bloodshot, his mouth parched, and his head throbbed violently. He stood for a while, staring about the room, before he could collect himself suffi-

ciently to recall what had happened ; then dragging a chair to the black chimney-place, he seated himself with his elbows resting on his knees, his head between his hands, and twisting his fingers in his matted hair. He sat thus, neither moving nor speaking, until aroused by a knock at the door. 'Come in,' said he, without altering his position. The door opened gently, and but partially. 'Come in, I say!' repeated he, looking over his shoulder ; 'no one will bite you.'

The person thus addressed opened the door widely, walked in, stared around inquiringly, then stopped short, and looked at Wilkins as if to seek an explanation.

'You see, Higgs, *she's off!*' said Wilkins, in reply to the look ; 'cleared out last night. I expected it long ago.'

'Humph !' replied Higgs, clearing his throat, and remaining exactly in the same position ; 'I expected it myself. I thought you 'd drive her to it at last. Women ain't iron, nor brutes.'

'I know *all* women are not,' replied Wilkins, averting his face with a feeling of shame which he could not shake off ; but *some* are.'

'And so are some *men*,' replied Higgs, with the same imperturbable composure.

'Holloa, there!' exclaimed Wilkins, pushing his chair about, so that he faced his friend, and sitting bolt upright ; 'what's in the wind now ? Was it a sermon you were writing last night, and have you come here to preach it ?'

'George,' said Higgs with some solemnity, 'I have not pressed a bed since the night before last ; nor, excepting a hard apple, have I tasted any thing but water since then. Under this accumulation of emptiness, I feel moral.'

'The devil you do !' said Wilkins, rising and going to the cupboard, from which he drew a bottle and a tin cup, and handed them to Higgs ; 'then the sooner you get rid of your

morality, the better. Drink deep,' said he; 'it will clear your ideas.'

'I think so myself,' replied Higgs, tossing off about a gill of pure brandy, and again pouring into the cup the same quantity, which he disposed of with equal celerity. 'That will do for the present; but do n't lock it up,' said he, returning the bottle to Wilkins, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

Wilkins took it, poured out some of the liquor, drank it off at a swallow, replaced the bottle and cup, but without locking the cupboard, and made a sign to Higgs to draw a chair to the table.

For some moments these two worthies sat on opposite sides of the table, each intently scrutinizing the countenance of the other.

'Well,' said Higgs, wearied with this long examination of lineaments which, to confess the truth, were not the most prepossessing in the world, and whose natural deficiencies were not at all diminished by the lack of a very recent application of either water or a razor; 'I'm a beauty, ain't I?'

'What did you mean by your speech to me, when you came in?' demanded Wilkins, distrustfully, without heeding the remark, and without turning his eyes from the face of his visitor.

'I meant poverty and thirst!' replied Higgs, leaning back in his chair, and returning, without quailing, the stern inquiring glance of his comrade.

'And you will abide by the agreement of last night?' demanded Wilkins, without abatement of the harshness of his voice.

'That's what I came for,' replied Higgs, quietly.

'You'll give every aid you can?'

'I will.'

‘And will never blab?’

‘No.’

‘Higgs,’ said Wilkins, ‘I have known you many a long year, and I believe you; but remember this: if we succeed, you shall have your pay in full — down to the very cent; but your mouth must be as close as the grave; for if you betray us, there will be one man murdered whose name I could mention.’

‘Well, I’ll agree to it. And now about Lucy — your wife?’

‘You’ll swear strong *there?*’ said Wilkins, mastering an evident disinclination to speak of her. ‘Last night’s freak, cunningly worked up, will tell strongly against her. If that fails, we must not want other evidence. When we have once commenced, we must not be foiled.’

‘Trust to me,’ replied Higgs. ‘If swearing will carry the matter through, you may consider it settled. I feel a strong personal interest in the affair.’

‘Ah! ha!’ said Wilkins, ‘the thousand touches you nearly, does it?’

‘No,’ returned his companion, with a sentimental shake of the head, at the same time pulling up his stock; ‘it’s not that. The cash is not amiss; but *all* my feelings are not mercenary.’

Wilkins was touched at the disinterestedness of his comrade, and extending his hand to him, said: ‘I was wrong, Bill, to doubt you; you *are* a good fellow — you are a *friend*.’

‘So I am,’ returned the other; ‘but it was n’t *that* that I meant.’

‘Well, then,’ said Wilkins, with some abatement in the fervor of his gratitude, ‘what *did* you mean?’

‘Why,’ replied his friend, ‘I have been thinking that when

you had obtained this divorce, and you and Lucy were cut adrift, that *I* would marry her myself. I always had a liking for that woman.'

Had a bullet pierced Wilkins to the heart, the pang could not have been greater. His arms fell powerless. Every fibre of his sinewy frame relaxed; his face grew wan and ghastly; and he sank back in his chair as if smitten with death; his jaw hanging down, and his eyes staring with a hideous glare upon Higgs.

'God! George! what's the matter?' exclaimed that gentleman, springing up, and instinctively rushing to the cupboard for the liquor. 'Here, swallow this,' said he, extending a cupful; 'here, it will do you good. What ails you?'

Nothing, nothing,' returned Wilkins, putting aside the cup; 't is past now. I have these turns sometimes. But, Higgs, I think you had better not marry Lucy. You do n't know her; you'll repent it.'

'I'll risk it,' replied the other, replacing the bottle. 'As soon as the divorce is granted, I'll make the attempt.'

Again Wilkins felt that sensation of deadly faintness; but he bore up against it.

'I'm not too well-to-do in the world at present,' continued Higgs; 'but when I've touched the thousand you promised, we'll go to the country, and be quite snug and comfortable.'

Never, since the early days of their marriage, had the love of Lucy appeared so enviable as when he heard the coarse-minded man at his side speaking of her as his own. 'A thousand!' If he but had it, he would give up the widow — *all* — to have Lucy with him; to see her happy face looking up in his, and to know that there was one who would cling to him to the last. In the midst of these thoughts, the recollection of the preceding night came gloomily over him. Fearful, however, of exhibiting his emotions, he turned to

Higgs, and said with a sneer : ' Well, success to your suit ! I wish you joy of your wife with a tainted fame.'

' But won't I know how little she deserves it !' exclaimed Higgs, with more animation than was usual in him ; ' won't I know that her like does n't live, and that all attacks upon her are false ! I ought to !'

Wilkins felt that he was caught in his own snare. Now was the time for his fate to be decided—to go on, or to stop at the threshold of crime. For a moment he hesitated. The struggle was short, but it was fearful. The decision was made, and by it he marked out for himself a course of crime and misery which, had he known its full bitterness, would have sickened his very soul. He was in no mood to continue his conference ; and, making a plea of not feeling well, he proposed that they should walk out, and defer the discussion of their plans to some more convenient occasion.

' Just as you like,' replied Mr. Higgs, making the only change that his means afforded him, preparatory to going into the cold air, by buttoning the lower buttons of his coat, and thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets.

Wilkins flung on his shaggy over-coat ; and shutting the door after them, and depositing the key in his pocket, the two sallied out into the street.

CHAPTER VI.

IN a by-street, which meandered to its destination with all the devious windings of a drunken man, was a small eating-shop, down six steps in a cellar, and with glass doors shaded by scanty curtains of red moreen. From time immemorial it had been an eating-house, and had been distinguished by a sign over the entrance, representing an elderly gentleman with a large stomach, a fat face, and a fiery nose, seated at a table, griping in his hand a fork, stuck to the handle in a sirloin of beef, and looking venomously at a lean little fellow with mazarine blue eyes and dimity small-clothes, who occupied a small corner of the same picture. The old gentleman was typical of the larder below, and was meant to be illustrative of the state to which hard eating and hard drinking, backed by a good digestion, would bring a man; but if he was intended as a bait for the passers-by, he was certainly a most untempting one; for a more uncomfortable, ill-looking, irascible, red-nosed old gentleman, one would scarcely wish to see. The thin man was a pale, half-starved devil, with a hungry eye, who looked as if he had sucked his last meal out of the spout of a bellows, and was none the better for it. The whole picture was a fable, and the small eating-house below, with its six steps and red curtains, was the moral to it.

But Time had had a word to say in the matter. The sign-board had hung there year in and year out. The school-boys who had pelted it with stones and snow-balls had grown into men, and others had taken their places; but there the

old sign still hung. Its typical character, however, was changed ; for although the old gentleman retained his rotundity of abdomen, he had acquired a thread-bare look ; his face had subsided into a pale, unhealthy brick color ; his eyes were fixed intently on nothing, which he seemed to see at the far end of the street ; and, as the penalty of his former high living, he appeared to be going off in a severe dropsy. As for the pale man, he had gradually withdrawn himself from the public gaze ; and a pair of sickly blue eyes, looking mournfully out of the sign-board, alone told where he once had been.

Whatever may have taken place in the sign-board, the eating-house still held its ground. It was none of your new-fangled establishments which aspire to French cookery and clean table-covers. It was a solemn place ; dark, damp and smoky, with dingy table-cloths, broken castors, and the usual number of dead flies reposing at the bottom of the oil-cruet.

In the middle of the room was a small stove, near which a sleepy bar-keeper dozed in his chair, and between his naps kept an uneasy eye on a customer who sat at a small table, with his hat on, his coat buttoned to the chin, and his legs resting on a chair. There was something in the calm composure of the man not to be mistaken. It was Mr. Higgs. He had long since finished his meal, as an empty dish and plate testified, and was deeply immersed in a newspaper. Occasionally he raised to his lips a small mug which had contained beer, but which had been empty more than an hour ; and then plunged into the paper more deeply than ever. At every rustle of the paper, the bar-keeper opened his eyes heavily ; concentrating them with a dull leaden stare on Mr. Higgs ; wondered what there could be in that paper to take up so much of his attention ; why he did

not pay for his dinner and go; and then, in the midst of these reflections, nodded off into another slumber. Still Mr. Higgs read on, up one column and down another; he turned the paper over and over, and over again. It grew dusky, then dark. He ordered the candles which stood in the bar to be lighted, and slowly and deliberately read on — every thing; editorial, statistical, geographical; shipwrecks, accidents, outrages, marriages and deaths; and then, with a coolness that was perfectly astounding, he commenced upon the advertisements. Three mortal hours had he been there! The bar-keeper stood bolt upright and walked across the room, coughed violently, and poked the fire. The fire was getting low, which made the dozing uncomfortable; so he went for wood. No sooner was he out of the room than Mr. Higgs arose, sauntered leisurely to the door, sprang up the steps, and scampered off at full speed; forgetting in his hurry to pay his bill. He darted up one street, down another, and across a third, around corners, and altogether showed a knowledge of blind alleys and dark passages that was perfectly wonderful. At last he turned into a wide street, at some distance from where he started. Here he subdued his pace to a rapid walk.

He had agreed to meet Wilkins at a particular hour, and as it was near the time, he made directly for the place where he expected to find him. It was a cold, damp night: the sky was filled with murky clouds, drifting across the black heavens like an army of spectres hurrying forward on some ill-omened errand. The streets were wet and sloppy; the shop-windows covered with a dense moisture, which trickled down them like tears; and the lamps inside emitted a glimmering light, just enough to show how dismal the streets were, without cheering them.

Higgs, however, wended his way, impenetrable to cold and

damp. He met a few people muffled to the throat, with their heads bent down, to keep the mist out of their faces. In one street he passed a shivering woman, crouching in a dark door-way, and in another an old shed, under which a beggar-boy was sleeping soundly on the damp ground, with a rough, wiry dog keeping watch at his side. He did not stop until he came in front of a small house, in a dark cross-street, with a lamp before it, on which was written in red letters, 'QUAGLEY'S RETREAT.' Without knocking, he opened the door, and found himself in a room brilliantly lighted with gas, and having a billiard-table in the centre of it. One or two rough-looking men were lolling on wooden settees: two others were engaged in playing at the table; and a stunted boy, with a square mouth, officiated as marker, and kept the score of the game. In one corner Mr. Quagley was reposing on a wooden bench, laboring to get through a profound slumber into which he had been forced by the united efforts of six tumblers of water, liberally diluted with gin, and casually imbibed by him in the course of the last hour.

Higgs paused as he entered, took off his hat and knocked it against the wall, to shake off the moisture; unbuttoned his coat, and taking it by the collar, shook it violently, stamped on the floor as if he intended to kick a hole through it, then replaced his hat, buttoned his coat, seated himself on a bench near the table, and looked at the stunted marker, who returned his stare without flinching. Higgs nodded to the stunted marker, and the stunted marker nodded back again.

'Holloa!' said Higgs, addressing him.

'Holloa yerself!' replied the boy, without moving.

'Have n't you got legs?' demanded Mr. Higgs.

'Yes, I have,' said the boy, looking complacently down

at two slim supporters, which were comforting themselves with the mistaken idea that they filled a large pair of inexpressibles.

‘Well, can’t you use them?’ demanded Mr. Higgs.

‘Yes, I can,’ said the lad, without stirring, except to count up the scores of the two players.

‘Well, why do n’t you?’

‘I am a-usin’ ’em,’ said he, straightening himself up, to show fully what a weight those two slim legs were supporting.

‘You *are* a nice boy,’ said Higgs, looking at him with a very supercilious eye.

‘I know I am,’ replied the boy, returning his stare with interest.

‘Of course you are. Who’s your mother?’

‘Who’s yourn?’ said the stunted marker, giving his square mouth an agonized twist, by which he was in the habit of deceiving himself into the belief that he was laughing, and concluding the performance by thrusting his tongue into his cheek, pulling down the corner of his eye, applying the end of his thumb to the tip of his nose, and at the same time indulging the rest of his fingers in a few aërial gyrations. Having got through these, and several other lucid gesticulations, by which small boys are in the habit of testifying their sense of keen enjoyment, he settled down into a subdued gravity, and went on scoring the game as if nothing had happened.

‘Now that you’ve got through that pleasant performance,’ said Mr. Higgs, ‘perhaps you can answer a plain question.’

‘Perhaps I can,’ said the boy, standing bolt upright, and shouldering his stick.

‘Has Wilkins been here to-night?’

‘No, he has n’t,’ he replied; ‘nor I do n’t care if he do n’t

come,' he added gratuitously; 'that's more.' As he said this, he instantly set about repeating the performance which he had just concluded, with embellishments.

'Holloa there!' shouted Mr. Quagley, awakening in the midst of the exhibition, and rising from his recumbent position, and looking full at the boy, who became grave instantly. 'A cussed nice sort of baby you are; a sweet 'un! 'Tend to what you've got to do, will you? None of them shines here — mind that. They won't go down.' And Mr. Quagley shook his head at the boy, in a manner which intimated that if what he had said did not operate, he might be induced to administer a more powerful medicine, that would.

As he spoke, Mr. Quagley rose, and still keeping an eye on the stunted marker, and giving his head one or two additional shakes, partly to settle his brains in their right place, and partly to let the boy know that he was in earnest, walked across the room, and seated himself at the side of Higgs.

'Mr. Higgs,' said he, solemnly, 'you are a gentleman, and can appreciate a gentleman's feelings.' And Mr. Quagley paused for a reply.

'I hope I can,' replied the person thus addressed.

'Well, then,' continued Mr. Quagley, after having settled that point to his satisfaction, 'you see that there boy;' and he nodded towards the stunted marker.

Higgs replied that he believed he did.

'Well, Sir, I keep that boy on his poor mother's account. Now that's honorable, ain't it?'

Mr. Higgs replied that it was — very.

'I knew you could appreciate a gentleman's feelings,' said Mr. Quagley. 'What'll you drink?'

'Rum cocktail,' said Higgs, without an instant's hesitation.

'Gin slings is healthier for the liver,' said Mr. Quagley; 'shall it be slings?'

‘No, a rum cocktail,’ replied Higgs, resolutely; ‘it can’t hurt *my* liver; I ain’t got one.’

Mr. Quagley pondered for some time, as to the possibility of that fact; but after having made several desperate efforts to corner an idea which was running loose in his head, he said it was no matter, and went off to prepare the drinks, with which he soon returned.

Seating himself by the side of Mr. Higgs, he pleasantly introduced his elbow between that gentleman’s two lowest ribs, and winking at the stunted marker, whose back was toward him, said: ‘He’s one of the tallest kind, that boy.’

‘He does n’t look so,’ said Mr. Higgs, removing, with the end of his little finger, a small speck which was floating in his tumbler.

‘I know he do n’t, but he *is*. I mean in character, you know.’

‘Oh!’ said Mr. Higgs, ‘that’s it.’

‘Yes, that’s it. He’s a boy of the tallest kidney.’

‘I should think he was; and then he has so many pleasant little ways with him,’ replied Mr. Higgs.

‘Do you think so?’ said Mr. Quagley, earnestly.

‘Well, I think so myself; but then you know it would n’t do to let him *know* it, you know. It ’ud spoil him.’

‘Of course it would,’ said Mr. Higgs, gently shaking his glass, to stir up the sugar in the bottom of it; ‘of course it would.’

‘Do n’t be a-lookin’ here!’ shouted Mr. Quagley to the boy, in pursuance of his system. ‘You ’m to look at the table, and you ’m to mark the game; and if you do n’t, you ’m to be wollopped.’

‘That’s the way to larn ’em,’ said Mr. Quagley, in a low tone, in continuation of his observation. ‘Good-evening, Sir; a stormy night.’ This last remark was addressed to

Wilkins, who had just entered, and was standing a few feet inside of the door, with his hand shading his eyes from the strong light, and looking about him, to see who were in the room.

‘Oh! you are here, are you?’ said he, coming up to Higgs. ‘It’s time we were on the move. Come.’

Higgs rose, and bidding Mr. Quagley ‘Good-night,’ followed his comrade into the street.

‘What o’clock is it?’ asked Wilkins, who seemed in one of his most sullen moods.

‘I do n’t know; ’most ten, I s’pose.’

Without making any remark, with his teeth set, and a scowl on his face, Wilkins led the way until he came to the house in which the attorney had his office.

‘There’s where he keeps,’ said he, pointing to the old building, towering far above them in the darkness, and apparently stretching out its arms to beckon them on. ‘It will tumble down some day, and I wish it was down now; for I never go into it without feeling as if I were entering the gate of hell.’

Higgs stood in front of the house, and, as well as the darkness would permit, surveyed it from top to bottom. ‘Quite an elderly mansion. I do n’t half like it. D——d if I believe a man who lives in such a house can pay; and d——d if I work without it — that’s plump!’ As he said this, he thrust his hands to the very bottom of his pockets, and patted his feet on the ground, with an expression that seemed to say to them, ‘Stir at your peril!’

‘Come along, will you?’ said Wilkins, impatiently: ‘you have nothing to fear. You need n’t do any thing till you’re paid. You can hear what he’s got to say, and if you do n’t choose to take a part in it, you need n’t. You’d better, though.’

‘Well, go on,’ said Higgs, apparently satisfied. ‘Lead the way; for it’s bloody dark, and smells as damp and close as a churchyard.’

Groping their way into the dilapidated door-way, they came to the foot of the stairs.

‘Here we are,’ said Wilkins, pausing. ‘Up that stairs, and we are at his room. Now mind me, Higgs; if the pay’s good, you are to have no quaking nor qualms; not a muscle must move. He’s got an eye like an eagle, and it won’t escape him.’

Higgs uttered a low, significant laugh, and pulling down his coat, and up his cravat, by way of giving additional respectability to his appearance, said: ‘Pshaw! go on, won’t you?’

Wilkins, reassured by the indifferent manner of his comrade, ascended the narrow stairs, and feeling his way along a dark passage, knocked at the door of the office.

To this there was no reply.

‘He’s not in,’ said Higgs.

‘Yes he is. He’s hiding his papers. He’s not sure who are standing on this side of the door. Click, slam; there goes the door of his iron safe; they are under lock and key. Now I’ll knock again.’

As he spoke, Wilkins applied the head of his stick to the door. The next moment a cautious step was heard, the key was noiselessly turned, to induce the supposition that the door had not been locked, and in a few seconds they were told to come in.

On entering, they found the attorney sitting at a table strewn with papers, one of which he appeared to be perusing. His hair was disordered; his face pale and wan, as if from fatigue; and his whole person in disarray. He did not look up until they were near the table, and then carelessly,

as if he scarcely noticed their entrance. No sooner, however, did he see who they were, than he threw the paper aside, rose and said :

‘So you’ve come. I am glad of it.’

‘I thought you’d be,’ said Wilkins. ‘This is the man I spoke of,’ he added, jerking his head sideways toward Higgs, who stood eyeing the attorney from head to foot. ‘He knows all about it; so you are saved the trouble of telling the story over again.’

Without replying, Bolton opened the door and looked down the passage. He then locked it, led his visitors into the back office, closed the door, and taking one of the lights from the table, held it up in Higgs’s face. Never perhaps had two pairs of more unflinching eyes met. Every line, every feature, every muscle, was examined and reëxamined. At last Bolton replaced the light, and said that he was satisfied; to which Higgs replied that he was glad of it, for he thought he never would be.

Bolton took the reply in good part, and after a few remarks, proposed to proceed to business, for which the two worthies expressed themselves perfectly ready.

Opening the iron safe, he took out a paper, on which was endorsed in large letters, ‘*Last Will and Testament of John Crawford.*’

‘Is that the new one?’ asked Wilkins, as he brought the paper to the light.

‘That’s it.’

‘And without the legacy?’

‘Yes; he has altered his mind since I saw you,’ said the attorney, laughing, ‘and I drew the paper to suit him.’

‘I supposed he would,’ said Wilkins; ‘how is the old fellow?’

‘He holds out yet, but they say he won’t last long.’

‘And the girl, his daughter — his *natural* daughter — how will she take his death?’

‘She do n’t know about it yet. When she finds it out, it will be a perfect hurricane, but it will soon blow over.’

Wilkins replied that he supposed so; and Higgs, not feeling any particular interest in the conversation, amused himself by smelling at the mouth of a bottle on the mantel-piece. On ascertaining that it contained ink, he comforted himself with a very moderate draught of cold water from the pitcher, and seating himself near the fire, set about heating the poker through the bars of the grate.

After some farther conversation, Bolton asked Higgs if he were ready to witness the paper, to which that gentleman replied that he was — almost.

‘Are you acquainted with its nature?’ asked the attorney.

‘I know it’s old John Crawford’s will; but I do n’t know what’s in it.’

‘That’s not necessary,’ replied Bolton. ‘You are to swear that you saw him execute it; that he declared it to be his last will and testament, and asked you to become a witness to it; and that you did so in his presence. You must swear to this.’

‘Had n’t I better read it?’

‘No; you are not expected to know the contents. It would be suspicious if you did. He would n’t read his will to a stranger, although he might use him as a witness.’

The force of this remark seemed to strike Mr. Higgs, who made no other reply than returning to the fire, and again introducing the poker between the bars of the grate.

A pen was handed to Wilkins, who in a rough bold hand wrote his name and place of residence.

‘Now, Mr. Higgs,’ said Bolton, turning to him, ‘will you sign?’

‘I was told,’ said Higgs, pausing in his occupation at the grate, and looking up at the attorney, ‘that the old gentleman had requested you to hand me over a thousand, when I became a witness to his final wind-up.’

‘A check is filled out for half that amount, and ready for you,’ said Bolton, opening a drawer in the table, and producing the check. ‘The other five hundred will be yours when the will is proved. It will be in a fortnight or so after his death.’

Higgs looked at the check. Placing it in his pocket, he took up the pen and scrawled his name and place of abode beneath that of Wilkins.

‘That will do,’ said Bolton. He then folded up the will, placed it in the safe, which he locked, and laid the key on the table.

‘That’s done,’ said he. ‘No doubt the old gentleman feels easier, now that his property is cared for.’

‘I suppose he does; he ought to,’ replied Higgs. ‘Everybody has n’t such kind friends. What a pity! It would save them so much trouble!’

Bolton laughed, and said: ‘Mr. Higgs, you know the risk of this matter. We sink or swim together. You’ve got part of your pay. If we succeed, you’ll get the rest; and we *must* succeed, if you perform your part well, and keep your own counsel. If you *do n’t*, look out! — that’s all.’

‘I will,’ said Higgs, quietly. ‘If I intend to betray you, I’ll murder you first; so you may be certain that your secret’s safe, unless you should happen to wake up some pleasant morning, and find your throat cut.’

Higgs did not alter his voice as he spoke. Its tone was even particularly soft; but the attorney drew back as if he had encountered a snake; for there was *that* in the sharp gray eye, as it looked in his own, and in the sudden but moment-

any change of feature, which drove the blood to his heart. Before he recovered himself, Higgs got up, and taking his hat, said: 'I must be off now. When you want me, you can let me know, and tell me beforehand what's to be done. Good-night.'

No sooner was he gone, than Bolton turned to Wilkins and said, 'Do you know this man well? We are both in his power; and if he should prove false, he may put us where neither of us would care to go.'

'I have known him for years. I've explained all to him, thoroughly. He knows the risk,' was the reply; 'and if you perform your part as well as he'll do his, all will end as you wish it.'

'If it had n't been for that last look of his,' said Bolton, 'I should have doubted it. D—n it! I did n't half like the expression of his eye when he talked so pleasantly of 'cutting my throat.' Did you notice that?'

'Do n't tempt him then, that's all,' said Wilkins.

The attorney paced the office in deep thought; sometimes stopping short and looking in the fire, and then walking on with a hurried, irregular step. At last he paused.

'That girl you were speaking of,' said he, addressing Wilkins; 'what have you done with her?'

Wilkins was crouching, rather than sitting in his chair, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and his knees gathered up as if for a spring. He did not reply until his companion repeated the question.

'She's *gone*,' he said at last.

'Left you!' exclaimed Bolton; 'you do n't mean eloped?'

'She's *gone*,' replied Wilkins, 'for good, I suspect. She went last night at ten, and I have n't seen her since.'

'Has she any relatives, or any female friend, to whom she might go at that hour?'

‘No.’

‘Where do you suppose she went to?’

‘God only knows!’ replied Wilkins; ‘I do n’t.’

‘There was a cause, I suppose?’ said Bolton, looking him full in the face. ‘What was it?’

‘Well,’ said Wilkins, ‘I’ll tell you. When I went home, I was full of what we had talked of. I was half mad; and when I got to the house, I cursed her, and did all that I could to get her up to what we wanted.’

‘Well?’

‘And so, when I found that nothing else would do, I struck her — down to the very floor. There!’ said he, starting from his chair, and dashing his hand across his face, ‘that’s all! She could n’t stand *that*, and she went. And now,’ continued he, beating his hand against his forehead, ‘it sticks here — here! This d——d head of mine is filled with all sorts of strange fancies and images of *her*. Do what I will, there they stick. I have been drinking, too, but I can’t drink them away. I went to the widow’s, but I could n’t make up my mind to go in; and I was afraid to return to my own home; for it seemed no longer a home without *her*: so I have wandered the streets since morning. I have eaten nothing, and am weary and foot-sore.’

As he spoke, the wretched man placed his arms on the table, and leaned his head heavily upon them. But in a moment, he started up and stood erect in front of the lawyer. ‘Bolton,’ said he, ‘you must carry this matter through without flinching: you *must*, by G—d! — for you have made me what I am. I was an honest man till I fell in with you; and you know what came then.’

‘*What?*’ demanded the attorney, sharply.

‘What comes to every man that falls into your clutches,’ said he, speaking thick and fast. ‘I had money — *that* went;

I had business — *that* went ; I had friends, a fair name, bright hopes and prospects — and *they* went ! *All* — every one of them ; nothing left ; not one single soul ! And *you*,' said he, shaking his clenched fist in the lawyer's face, 'you were the cursed, cringing, skulking thief that stole them away, one by one, until I became what I am ! You said last night, you'd have nothing to do with a murder,' exclaimed he, with a wild, fierce laugh, that made the room ring. 'I don't know *that*. You might be mistaken there. Do you know,' said he, suddenly sinking his voice, and going up to the attorney, and leaning his elbow on his shoulder, while he looked over in his face, 'do you know I often wonder that I don't cut your throat at once, and have done with it ? I swear I *do* ! It must come to that at last.'

'You'd be a fool for your pains,' said Bolton, with an appearance of indifference which he was far from feeling. 'If I got you into difficulties, I'm the only man who can get you out of them, and you know it. But you are excited to-night. Come here some other time, and we'll talk over your matters. You are worn out now.'

'So I am,' said Wilkins, whose momentary passion was over. 'Hand me that pitcher.'

The attorney complied, and Wilkins raised it to his lips, and took a long draught.

'This law plays the devil with one's nerves. I'll talk the matter over to-morrow. I scarcely slept last night ; and to-day every thing has been like a dream. I wonder if I'll sleep to-night. I'll try, any how. Good-night.' As he spoke, he took his hat, and before the attorney was aware of his intention, had quitted the room.

Bolton listened, as his heavy tread echoed through the silent building ; but long after Wilkins had left him and had sought his guilty home, did the lawyer walk up and down

that room. The fire went out ; one candle burnt to the socket, and at last flickered out ; but he did not notice it. It was not until a neighboring clock struck the hour of three, with a tone so solemn and clear that it seemed at his very elbow, that he was aware it was far in the night. Extinguishing the remaining light, he locked his office and sought his own abode.

CHAPTER VII.

As Wilkins went through the streets, there was that busy within him which made him shun the face of man. For in his heart and soul there was a depth of misery, mingled with hate, fear, and fury, that beggared all that he had ever felt before. Yet his course was onward. He would not pause; he would not think. He was like the stricken beast that dashes madly on, tracking its path with its own blood, but bearing the arrow in its side. When he left the attorney's office, although it was late at night, and but few were stirring, he shrank from the frequented streets. He sometimes walked rapidly, and sometimes he ran. At one time a solitary man was coming toward him, and Wilkins slunk into a dark alley to avoid him. At another time he stopped, and looked listlessly at the black sky; and then went on muttering and talking to himself, and uttering curses low and deep, which sent a chill to the heart of the few who happened to pass, and made them quicken their steps until they were far away from so ill-omened a neighbor.

Yet with all his wretchedness there was no swerving from his course; no shrinking from his purpose. With a desolate heart; with a fearful consciousness of crime; with the awful conviction that God himself had raised his hand against him, and had written his malediction upon him in characters which every man could read; with a love for his wife which poverty and suffering for a time had stifled, but which, now kindling into fresh existence, and, together with remorse, acting upon a disposition fierce, wayward, and yet irresolute,

had driven him half mad ; he still breasted his way on, cursing and cursed ; wretched in his own heart, and a source of wretchedness to others.

Skulking beneath the black shadow of the houses, and shunning the eye of his fellow-men, as if his own evil purposes gave them the mastery over him, that guilty man pursued his course, stealing through those streets which were the most gloomy, avoiding the thronged thoroughfares when he could, and dashing hastily across them when he could not ; until, at last, he found himself in front of his own home. All was dark. He paused, and looked up at the window, where he was in the habit of seeing his wife watching for his arrival. But no one was there. Muttering something between his teeth, he strode through the narrow entry and tried the door. It was locked, and resisted his efforts. Thrusting his hand in his pocket, he drew from it a key, unlocked the door, and with the air of one who expected and was resolved to meet something disagreeable, flung it open until it struck the wall, and rattled on the hinges. The room was dark, with the exception of the light which struggled in from the dim lamps in the street. Slamming the door behind him, he groped his way to a cupboard, and taking a flint and steel, succeeded in striking a light. Holding it high above his head, he looked wistfully about, examining every part of the room, and pausing at every sound. All, however, bore the mark of desertion. The fire-place was filled with ashes, and one or two half-burnt brands of wood were lying on the hearth ; and the room seemed very cheerless, and as cold and damp as a church-vault.

So she was gone, and there was no chance of her return ! He had hitherto buoyed himself up with a faint and half-acknowledged hope that she would come back, and would humbly beg to be forgiven. He had expected a severe strug-

gle; that when they parted, it would be amid tears, supplications, and protestations on her part; and that he would stand before her in the light of a husband whom deep wrong had rendered stern and inflexible. For this he was prepared. He had expected to choose his own time for the consummation of his purpose. She had borne so much, so long, and so patiently, that he thought there was no limit to her endurance. But he had overtaken her at last. She had deserted one who had broken his vow to love and protect her, and had thrown herself upon the charity of a world — the poor and wretched only know how ‘cold and heartless.’ He searched, in hopes of finding something to tell where she was; but there was nothing of the kind. Every thing was undisturbed as he had left it; and all very quiet and very sad! And there was something so solemn yet reproachful in the dead silence, that he experienced a strange sensation of fear, and scarcely dared to remain alone in that melancholy room. He opened the closet, looked under the bed, behind the chairs; and yet—he could not tell why—he was strangely restless. His foot struck against something on the floor, and he picked it up. It was a small needle-case which he had given to his wife a long time previously. There was nothing either curious or uncommon about it, and he had often seen it; but he held to the light, and examined it again and again, and then laid it gently on the table, as if he feared the slightest touch might break it. He felt an unusual thickness gathering in his throat. Walking across the room, he flung himself on a chair, and folding his arms, attempted to whistle; but the same feeling of suffocation rose in his throat and stopped him. Muttering a curse upon himself, he sprang up, and pulling his hat over his eyes, paced rapidly up and down the room. Once or twice he paused, as he heard a female voice. But it was only that of some

person in the street; and shaking his head, he continued his walk. At length he again went to the cupboard and opened it. A few shillings and some copper coins were lying on the lower shelf.

‘She has not even taken that!’ muttered he; ‘gone without a cent to keep her from starving! God!—what will she do! She must die, or——.’ As the thought of *her*, driven by hunger and distress to something worse, flashed across his mind, his eyes glared; he gasped for breath, and his limbs shook so that he could scarcely support himself. ‘It must not be! It *shall* not! No, no!—Lucy driven to *that*! No, no! it would make me mad! I’ll look for her. Ha! what’s this?—a tear! Poh! this is mere weakness. Let her go; yes, *let* her! It’s what I *want*, and will save me trouble in what I’ve got to do.’

Mastering the better impulses which were unnerving him, he seated himself, and leaning his head on the table, began to reflect on his former schemes—in what manner he might best carry them out. It was long before he could sufficiently command his feelings even to think. His mind was filled with strong misgivings; for although his wife had hitherto been rather his slave than companion, yet the resolution displayed by her on the preceding night convinced him that she would not sit silently under an attack against her fame. Jack Phillips, too, whose name he intended to link in guilt with hers, he feared. He had once been his friend, and professed to be so still, and he knew him to be bold and resolute. He felt sure that he would resist the charge which was to be made against him to the last, and would hurl back upon him accusations which he dreaded to meet. No alternative, however, presented itself; for there was no other whom he could accuse with a sufficient col-

oring of truth to justify even suspicion. But how to commence !

The more he reflected, the more difficult it seemed. He had just resolved that the next time he met Phillips he would to his face accuse him of the seduction of his wife, and would meet all the angry remonstrances, which he knew would ensue, with the air of one deeply wronged, but who had made up his mind to look to the laws of the land for redress ; and then to trust to the well-tried sagacity of Bolton to pilot him through the difficulties which surrounded him. Scarcely was his resolution formed, when there was a sharp knock at the door. 'It might be Lucy !' His face brightened, and he said : 'Come in !'

The door opened, and in walked a young man of about four-and-twenty. If ever a face bore the stamp of frank and open honesty, his did ; and as he entered the room and spoke to Wilkins, his voice was full of that honest gladness which the heart instinctively springs forward to meet, even in a stranger.

'No fire, and all dark !' said he after his first salutation. 'Where is your wife ?'

Wilkins attempted to look him in the face, but his eye quailed, and he made no answer.

'Are you deaf, George ?' asked the other ; 'where is your wife ?'

'No, I ain't deaf,' said Wilkins, sullenly. 'She's out. I suppose you can *see* that, can't you ?'

'I'm not blind,' said the young man, looking steadily at Wilkins, but without the slightest appearance of anger at his harsh language. There was a pause.

At last Wilkins said in a low tone : 'You said you were not blind, Jack Phillips.' He fixed his eyes on the face of

the young man with the cowed yet dogged stare of one who has resolved that he *would* look his opponent down. Phillips quietly answered :

‘I did say so.’

‘Nor am I.’

‘What do you mean? Speak out!’ said Phillips, with more impatience than he had hitherto shown.

Wilkins turned deadly pale, and rose to his feet. He tottered as he did so, and his fingers clutched convulsively. He walked straight to the door, locked it, put the key in his pocket, went back to the table, up to Phillips, and stood in front of him, face to face. The young man watched him without a word; and when he had locked the door, and stood thus menacingly before him, neither muscle nor feature evinced the slightest emotion.

Wilkins opened his vest, and with his fore-finger touched the handle of his dirk, and then buttoned his vest to the throat.

‘Did you see *that*?’ said he, watching the effect of the action upon his visitor.

‘I did,’ replied Phillips.

‘Well; what answer have you to make to it?’

‘*This!*’ said Phillips, for the first time warming into anger: ‘I deal not with such cut-throat weapons as that; nor do I know what the devil you would be at to-night; but here’s my answer.’ He held before him a fist which equalled in size the head of a small child: ‘And by Heaven! if I see your fingers approaching that dirk again, I’ll strangle you on the spot! I can do it—you know it; and by G—d I will! *That’s* my answer!’

As he spoke, he drew nearer to Wilkins, to be ready to execute his purpose; but after eyeing him for a moment, he said:

‘I did n’t come here to quarrel. It’s a late hour, I know; but I knew you’d be up, and I wanted to see you about a matter of some consequence: I’ve been here later than this before now.’

‘I *know* you have,’ said Wilkins; ‘I know that. I’m glad to see some honesty left; you admit *that*. He *admits* that! Ha! ha!’ He laughed so savagely that Phillips looked at him, and began to debate within himself the propriety of strangling him at once; but seeing no immediate danger, he deferred it for the present, and answered:

‘Of course I do. Why not?’

‘Oh! no reason in the world—none at all; especially if it’s true. Go on—go on; *do* go on!’

‘What ails you?’ exclaimed Phillips, surveying him from head to foot. ‘You seem out of your senses. Are you drunk, or mad, or what?’

‘What ails me?’ exclaimed Wilkins fiercely, and gradually working himself up to a sufficient pitch of anger to enable him boldly to make his intended charge: ‘Perhaps you don’t know, and perhaps you would like me to tell you.’

‘Yes, I would.’

‘Well, then, said he, ‘Lucy, my wife—I thought her all that she should be. I was a cursed blind fool—had no misgivings. I let her have her own way; was away much of the day, and never suspected any thing amiss until a friend gave me a hint.’

‘Who was that friend?’ demanded Phillips, in a clear, calm voice.

Wilkins hesitated, and at length refused to give the name.

‘Well—go on,’ said Phillips, in the same cold tone.

Wilkins went on. ‘I would n’t believe it at first, but it was made too clear, and I found *him* out too.’

‘Who’s the man?’ demanded Phillips, sternly.

Wilkins was silent ; but he set his teeth, and his eyes glowed as he fixed them on the face of his questioner.

‘ Who’s the man ? ’ repeated Phillips.

‘ You — *you* — you ! ’ screamed Wilkins, springing forward and striking him a violent blow at each word. ‘ You are the man ! ’

Phillips grasped him by the wrists, and pinioning them with a strength which he could not resist, held him off.

‘ I would half murder you for that, but that I think you are mad or drunk. There’s not one word of truth in what you have said. It’s a lie from beginning to end ; and you know it ! ’ He flung him from him as if he had been a child.

Wilkins sprang up and clenched his fists. His dark, sallow complexion grew almost black, and his eye wandered over the person of his opponent with a malignity of purpose which would have made one less courageous tremble.

‘ Do’n’t strike me again ! ’ exclaimed Phillips, in a quick, stern tone ; ‘ do’n’t do it ; or I’ll crush every bone in your body ! ’

For a moment the two stood on the eve of collision ; but Wilkins knew too well the strength of the man he had to deal with ; and with an attempt at moderation he said :

‘ Now I’ve told you who the man is, I suppose you’d like me to tell you where she went to when she cleared out, and why she went ? ’

‘ You need n’t tell me that,’ said Phillips. ‘ If that is n’t a lie too, I know the reason. I wonder that she did n’t do it before ; for if ever man gave woman cause to hate and curse him, you gave it to that poor girl. If she left you last night, it was because you had filled the cup of her bitterness to the brim, and treated her as man never treated woman. What you did, God only knows. You must have goaded her almost to madness. Perhaps, perhaps,’ said he, drawing

in his breath and clenching his fist, while with the other hand he grasped Wilkins by the arm, 'perhaps you *struck* her!'

'No, I did not,' said Wilkins, shrinking from the angry eye that encountered his, and feeling as powerless as a child in the iron grasp of his questioner.

'I'm glad of *that*. Now give me the key of that door. I'll not be in the same room with such a d——d scoundrel as you are.'

Without the slightest opposition, or a single word in reply, Wilkins drew the key from his pocket and gave it to him. Phillips paused as he took it, as if about to say something; but, apparently altering his mind, unlocked the door and went out.

As soon as he was gone, the wretched man who remained went to the door and turned the key. He then closed the window-shutters, and flung himself listlessly on a chair, twisting his fingers together. All trace of the passion which but a moment before had flashed in every feature was gone, and he groaned aloud in the very bitterness of his soul.

'That d——d attorney!' said he, shaking his hand menacingly, as if the object of his hatred were before him; '*he* led me on; *he* made me what I am; and I'll pay him off some day!' For some time he sat brooding over a scheme of revenge; then his mind wandered on until he thought of the main object of all his plans. He fancied himself successful, and surrounded by wealth. He thought of his wife, seated at his side, with her soft eyes looking fondly in his own, and of her joyful voice! He started up and wrung his hands. 'If he succeeded, his wife must be another than *her*!' Oh! the bitter and constant agony of crime!

CHAPTER VIII.

LATE on the night that Lucy had separated from her husband, an old gentleman, who was a physician, came out of a large house in the upper part of the city, where he had been lingering at the bedside of a patient. The night was pitchy dark, and there was no light in the street except what came from a solitary lamp, the result of the private enterprise of an apothecary, which gleamed like a green planet at the far end of the street. The old gentleman felt his way down the steps until he came to the last one, when he very deliberately fell over some one who was lying there, apparently asleep, and both rolled on the sidewalk together. The person thus disturbed remained perfectly motionless, uttering no sound nor cry. The old gentleman, however, did not take matters so quietly, and in the first burst of his surprise let off a volley of testy exclamations: but being naturally good-tempered, and withal hale and hearty, and brisk for his years, he picked himself up and trotted merrily on, wondering what could have induced any one to sleep on a stone step; it was very inconvenient, and on a dark night like this not a little dangerous. 'Suppose I had broken my neck?' thought he; 'or suppose I had broken his?' He stopped, for it just then occurred to him that something of the kind had happened; the sleeper had not stirred after the accident, nor even spoken. As this idea presented itself, he paused in front of the green lamp before mentioned, to make up his mind. This was soon done, and he trotted back to the person, who lay just as he had left him. Tak-

ing him by the arm, he shook it smartly. 'Wake up, my good fellow!' said he. There was no motion nor reply. He raised the arm, and it fell back lead-like and heavy, like that of a corpse.

'Drunk!' said he, 'and a *woman* too! Good God! what will they come to!' As he spoke, he slowly passed his fingers over her features, which were as cold as ice; held the back of his hand to her mouth, then took her by the wrist and felt her pulse.

'Dead! God of heaven grant that I have not killed her!' exclaimed he earnestly, with his fingers still on her wrist, and scarcely breathing, lest any sign of animation should escape his notice. A pulsation, so faint and fluttering that it would have been overlooked by one less intently anxious, was felt beneath his fingers. Springing up the steps, two at a time, he pulled the bell until the house echoed; then running down, he lifted the object of his solicitude in his arms, and reached the door just as a servant from the inside exclaimed:

'Who's there? and what do you want? Speak quick! You'd better, or I'll fire!' And something which looked more like a poker than any kind of fire-arm was protruded from behind the side-light.

'If you don't open the door, I'll give you something to fire for,' exclaimed the Doctor, on the outside.

Apparently the voice of the speaker was recognized, for the next moment the door opened, and a red-eared servant, with a considerable abatement in the ferocity of his tone, said: 'Oh! Doctor Thurston. It's you, is it, Sir?'

'To be sure it is. Hold the light here—quick!'

The servant, however, had heard strange stories about how doctors amused themselves in the night-time; how they stole into grave-yards and carried off dead people in their

shrouds; how coffins which ought to have been tenanted were found empty; how a black man who had set fire to a house and roasted a blind lady, and was hanged for it, was buried in Potter's-Field, and nothing was found when they went to look for him afterward except a foot with a wart on it. With these and many other facts of the same kind floating through his mind, the servant became strongly impressed with the belief that the elderly gentleman before him had stolen a corpse, and had brought it there in his arms for dissection; and having no great predilection for the company of dead people, he sprang across the entry with an agility quite singular in one usually remarkable for the great perseverance with which he was slow in every thing.

'Bring back the candle, you fool, will you?' said the Doctor, staggering under his burden, and finally depositing it in a chair. 'I'm afraid she's dead.'

'Of course she is. I know'd it from the fust, Sir,' said the servant, extending the light as near to, and his body as far from, the object of his fears as a man exactly one inch over five feet conveniently could. 'I hope it was n't a small-pox she diëd of, Sir; I never had it myself, and I've seven young 'uns at home as has never been 'nolated.'

The Doctor stared at him for a moment, and not being aware of the train of ideas which were passing through his head, told him to hold his tongue, and bring the light so that he could see what was the matter with the woman. 'There, that'll do. Let it shine in her face. How beautiful she is! — but how thin! Bring some wine; then wake up the cook, and let her make something warm, and let a fire be kindled in one of the bed-rooms. Be quick! How lucky that I stopped! She would have been dead in an hour.'

A ray of light gradually found its way into the mind of

the slow servant, like a sunbeam through a thick fog or a stray ray into a cave of bats, and he began to mutter something about the streets being 'good enough for the likes o' her; he guessed she was used to it; and if she had 'a died, he supposed she was n't the fust that did so; and he did n't see why the kitchen wasn't warm enough. When *he* was sick, he'd never had a bed-room; nor little Tommy nuther, although he'd had the measles awful.'

Catching the Doctor's eye in the midst of these under-toned mutterings, he put the light on a chair, and paced off with as much exactitude as if a duel was to be fought in the entry, and he was appointed to measure the distance.

Notwithstanding the slowness of the servant and the lateness of the night, but a short time had elapsed before the Doctor's instructions had been obeyed. When Lucy opened her eyes, (for it was she,) it was broad daylight; and she found herself in a large bed-room handsomely furnished, with an old gentleman sitting at the foot of the bed, reading a newspaper, and a young girl, scarcely older than herself, standing at the side of it, bathing her forehead.

'How do you feel, my good girl?' said the old man, putting down his paper and taking her hand; 'are you better?'

Lucy was bewildered at all that she saw: the two strangers; the rich and costly furniture; every thing so different from what she had been accustomed to. She closed her eyes, and endeavored to collect her thoughts. Like one who has been stunned, her recollection of the past was confused and indistinct. Strange figures, wild, distorted, and fanciful, flitted through her mind, like the fantastic forms in a dream. But one by one, the occurrences of the preceding night recurred to her more and more vividly, until they became fearfully distinct. She attempted to answer the inquiries of the physician, but she could not; and her head sank back on the pillow.

‘God bless me! poor thing!’ exclaimed the old gentleman; ‘completely exhausted!’ Hurrying across the room, he brought a glass containing something, which he placed to her lips: ‘There, drink that; don’t be afraid of it; it’ll do you good. Miss Crawford,’ said he, turning to the young lady who sat near the bed, ‘you doubtless think it strange, very strange, that I should thus unceremoniously bring this girl into your house; no doubt you do, but you see it was necessary, absolutely: she would have died before morning. She’ll do very well now; so I’ll just step down stairs and see what you’ve got for breakfast.’

For a long time after the old gentleman had eaten his breakfast, and read the paper through, he sat at the table, balancing his spoon on the edge of his cup, and looking very intently at the fire.

‘It’s very strange,’ said he, taking his handkerchief out of his pocket, and blowing his nose very hard; ‘it *is* strange;’ and then he got up and walked to the window, and looked abstractedly out in the wet streets. ‘I can’t bring myself to think this poor girl what I know she must be: appearances are much against her — *very* much against her;’ and he blew his nose very hard again. ‘Well, Mary, how’s your patient?’ said he, addressing a servant who came in at that moment.

‘She’s better, Sir; but she takes on sadly. She does nothing but cry. She’s been sadly used, Sir; I’m sure of it.’

‘Poor thing!’ said the old man; ‘they *are* horribly used — all of them.’

Without saying any thing more, he went up stairs, and going to Lucy’s bedside, felt her pulse; then sat down without speaking.

‘You are very kind,’ said Lucy, faintly, ‘to trouble yourself about one like me.’

‘It’s as I feared!’ thought the Doctor; but still he looked kindly at her.

‘You must have thought very ill of me, from where you found me—you and the lady,’ said she, looking toward the young girl, with a sadness that made her very heart ache. ‘I’m very poor, and have suffered much; but that’s all; and you wrong me if you think any thing worse than that.’

‘I knew it!’ said the Doctor, emphatically; ‘I said so from the first. Did n’t I, Miss Crawford?’

The young lady did not recollect any communication of the kind, so she only smiled and said nothing, and Lucy went on. Her tale was a long one, and sad enough. She told it all. She told how she had left the home and friends of her childhood. She told how they had loved her; how they had grieved at their parting, and what kind things they had said and done when she bade them farewell, and went off with one who had promised to love her, and to make her new home a happy one; how buoyant and confident she had felt, and how gay and light-hearted she was then; and how her mother had laid her hand upon her head, and blessed her, and blessed *him*, and hoped that God would prosper them in life, and make them love each other.

She had laughed then, and *he* (she would not mention his name) had laughed too, and they went away to her new home. Then her sorrows began. The news came that her mother was ill. Then came a letter; she was worse; and then another; she was dead. But her husband was kind to her, and soothed her, and did all that he could to make her forget her grief; and she was happy again, although she was alone, with no one in the wide world but *him*. She told how they had lived together long after the death of her mother; but her husband soon began to

change toward her ; he grew more and more cold. He went from his home oftener, and staid from it longer. He became stern and savage ; talked frequently of his poverty, and spoke to her as if she were the cause of it. One by one they sold every thing ; and as they became poorer, he grew more stern and fierce, until the night before, when his treatment had been such that she had left her home ; and now she knew not where to turn or whither to go. She refused to tell her husband's name ; and when she had finished, she turned her head upon the pillow, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

'*You* have a home, lady,' said she, and those about you who love you, and would go to the end of the world to serve you ; but I, God knows, I wish I was in my grave ! Not a soul will care for me — not even *he* !'

Her hearers listened in silence. They did not doubt the truth of her story — not for an instant. Her frail figure, her anxious eye, her faded cheek ; her wasted hand, so white and thin that they could almost see through it — all confirmed it.

For some time after she was silent, Miss Crawford and the Doctor sat watching her agitated face, as if they expected to hear something more ; but she had finished her tale.

At last the Doctor got up, walked to the window, looked out, cleared his throat with great emphasis, took a pinch of snuff, and then came back and seated himself.

'My God ! my poor girl ! this is dreadful treatment !' exclaimed he.

Lucy said something which they could not hear.

'And that husband of yours,' exclaimed he, growing excited ; 'what an infernal scamp he is ! Why, I'll ——'

Lucy laid her hand on his arm : 'Ah ! Sir, you don't know what want and suffering will do. Poverty with the

rich is not like poverty with the poor. With the first it is but the want of a few luxuries, or some little matter of convenience or pleasure. The poor have not even food. It is *that* which eats into a man's soul. Sometimes, the more he loves, the worse he is. That's the way with *him*. Do n't speak as you were going to. He was driven to what he did, and is sorry for it now. I know he is.'

'God bless me!' exclaimed Dr. Thurston, perfectly nonplussed. 'God bless me! did you ever hear the like? I'll be d——d—— (I beg pardon,' said he, bowing to Miss Crawford,) 'but I'll be positively d——d if she is n't standing up for that rascal who kicked her out of doors! She's mad—— must be. It can't *be* that any one in her senses would justify such an infernal good-for-nothing ——'

'Doctor,' said Miss Crawford, interrupting him, and leading him across the room, and speaking in a low tone, 'this poor girl is completely exhausted. Would it not be better to keep quiet ourselves, and keep her so? I think she needs sleep.'

'Always considerate, Miss Crawford; always like yourself,' said the warm-hearted old man, pressing the hand that rested on his arm: 'I hope you'll get a husband who *deserves* you——that's all.'

It is probable that the young lady had some ideas and hopes of her own on the subject, for she blushed deeply.

Both of them then used their utmost endeavors to soothe the patient; and they soon had the satisfaction of leaving her in a deep and quiet sleep. 'She'll be better when she awakes,' said he; 'and now, Miss Crawford, go to your room, for your watching here, and at your father's bedside, has been too much for you. You too want rest. It will never do for those eyes of yours to lose their brightness.'

The young lady suffered herself to be led from the room;

but just as the Doctor was preparing to leave her, she laid her hand on his arm, and said with a trembling voice :

‘ Doctor, I must now ask a question which I conjure you to answer me truly, on your honor. My father ’ — she paused to recover her calmness — ‘ what do you think of his situation ? Will he recover ? ’

The old man took both her hands in his, pressed them together, and in a solemn tone, that went to her very heart, said, ‘ God’s will be done ! ’ and hurried away.

The girl reeled as if she had received a sudden blow, and scarcely conscious of what she did, went to her own room, locked the door, and throwing herself on the bed, lay as one stunned.

TO THE EDITOR.

DEAR SIR:—I have just returned from the green fields, the blue skies, and the rich, glowing sunshine of the country. I spent my time in lingering through the dark shadowy woods, or in sauntering along the borders of a brook that wound through copse, meadow, and woodland; sometimes gliding in unruffled smoothness between fringed banks, and at others indulging a very choleric sputtering where stones or rocks stood in its way.

All was so fresh and gay and glowing, that I could scarcely persuade myself it was nature and not myself that was young. The flowers, the fields, trees, birds, all seemed the self-same that I had seen when a boy. A small, busy, bustling wren had her nest at the window of my room, and the first note that I heard at daybreak was the loud, joyous, gushing voice of that little bird. Oh! how my memory floated back on that tide of song to the days of childhood! A wren sang at my window then; and when I awake now, and hear the loud, glad note of this merry little chorister, I fancy myself still a child; that this long, long, weary life is a dream, and that I am not a decrepit, broken-down old man.

Yet when I once turned my face to the city, how I longed to reach my old home! With what an affectionate eye I looked at the old house! Its ruined walls, its small narrow windows, its creaking stairs and gloomy chambers, each had a corner in my heart; and it was with a glow of secret pride that I once more seated myself in my own chair, and felt that I was at home at last.

I found a number of letters awaiting my return; and among them the following from my former correspondent, Mr. Snagg:

'Sept. 9th, 1841.

'MR. JOHN QUOD, Esq.

'MY DEAR OLD BOY:—Some folks like what's pathetic—some do n't; and I am one of them. Do n't take it hard; but it's high time you should know you are going it too strong in that line. As for your heroine, she has done nothing but snivel and weep, from first to last. We found her at it, and left her at it. It's too much pork for a shilling. Now do give us something jolly—there's a good fellow! Sprinkle in a few chaps like that Higgs; or give us a little more of him. He knows a thing or two. The way he came it over the man in the eating-house was not so bad: but I could have given him a few hints in that line, which would be very useful to one of his standing in society. Perhaps you do n't know it; but that dog Bitters is your great card. Bring him forward often; he's a general favorite: 'My bowels fairly yearn toward him,' as some one says, somewhere—he's so like Slaughter! How he would pin a bull!

'As for Lucy—could n't you kill her quietly? If you could, it would be judicious; if you can't, dish her up in small quantities, or, by G-d! you'll turn some one's stomach. I've a sister who hates the name. She took to her bed when she first saw it: but now we scratch it out with a lead-pencil, and write Mary over it; and then, with the assistance of a smelling-bottle, she contrives to survive the reading of your correspondence. 'What's in a name,' etc., is all gammon.

'But all this is neither here nor there. I commenced this letter to say that several very respectable gentlemen of my acquaintance would be highly delighted to open a correspondence with you on things in general; and that we have

determined to make you a member of our club of 'Infant Roarers.' It would have been done at the last meeting; but one of our most distinguished dogs baited a bull in the upper part of the city; and two imported cocks were pitted against each other on the same evening. So that no one was present except myself (who came on purpose to nominate you) and one other very respectable gentleman, who was unable to attend either exhibition, owing to an infirmity in one leg, which he lately broke in a fight with a watchman.

'Of course, as you are an old man, you won't be expected to do much in the fighting way. Just drop in at the meetings when it's convenient. The dog-fights, bull-baits, etc., of course your own taste will lead you to attend; and, between you and I, if you should happen to be out on a lark with us, you might occasionally knock down a small watchman or a sickly one, just for the name of the thing. I'll attend to the big ones.

'Yours to the back-bone,

'ISAAC SNAGG.

'P. S.—I copy an extract from the minutes of the last meeting of the club of 'Infant Roarers.'

'RESOLVED: That we have read with the highest satisfaction the letter of ISAAC SNAGG, Esq., to Mr. JOHN QUOD, contained in the fourth number of that last gentleman's correspondence with the New-York KNICKERBOCKER, and that, with all due respect to that worthy gentleman, we consider the letter the most interesting portion of the correspondence, and that it does honor to the head and heart of the gentleman who penned it.

'RESOLVED: That to show our high regard for the talents of Mr. SNAGG, and for the merits of the valuable animal

whose virtues he commemorates, the said letter be recorded among the minutes of this Society.' 'I. S.'

About a week after the preceding letter, the following notice was left at my abode, as I was informed, by a small boy with one eye not a little damaged, from having recently come in contact with some hard obstacle — possibly a fist:

'Sept. 25th, 1841.

'SIR: I have the honor to inform you that at a regular meeting of the Society of Infant Roarers, held at their 'Den,' on the 21st day of September instant, you were unanimously elected a member of that Society.

'By order of the Trustees:

'JOHN SQUAIL, Sec'y.'

'To JOHN QUOD, Esq.

'A special meeting of the members of the Society will be held at the 'Den,' on the first day of October proximo, to take into consideration matters of much importance. A punctual attendance is requested, as it is desirable that the meeting should be as full as possible.

'JOHN SQUAIL, Sec'y.'

A day or two afterward I received the following letter from Mr. Snagg:

'September 27, 1841.

'MR. JOHN QUOD, Esq.

'MY DEAR BOY: Before this you will have received notice from the Secretary of the Society of I. R.'s, informing you that you are one of us. You went in by a unanimous vote; for you've no idea of the sensation your last number created among us — particularly my letter. There's to be a special

meeting of the Society on the first of next month. Do n't fail to be there. All the best bull-dogs in the country are to be produced, and a game-cock of a famous strain, the closest hitter and best mouther in the State; and it's said a match is to be made up between Big Ben and Raw Pete. Excuse my breaking off abruptly; but it wants a quarter to six, and I have appointed the hour of six precisely for a dun to call here, so that I might know exactly when to be out.

'Yours, t. t. m.,

'ISAAC SNAGG.'

In reply to the critique in the first letter of Mr. Snagg, I can only say that the web of the story is woven in truth, and it must take its course; but for the kindness which he has evinced towards me, I return my warmest thanks: as also for the honor conferred upon me, through his influence, by the Society of Infant Roarers; an honor which to say the least was most unexpected. My time, however, is so much taken up with other matters, that I fear I shall scarcely be able to attend their meetings with the punctuality which the rules of the Society and the importance of its objects require: but at all times, I shall be happy to receive any communication from the members of that respectable Society, or from any other person who numbers Mr. Snagg among his friends.

JOHN QUOD.

CHAPTER IX.

It was one of those bitter nights that cut one to the heart. The sharp wind went hissing through the streets, mocking the shivering limbs, and breaking the hearts of the wretched and homeless. Up and down the streets, through alleys and along broad avenues, it swept with the same intense rigor. The streets had been drenched with rain: puddles were standing in every hollow, the whole city was teeming with moisture, when this fierce wind came sweeping along. Every thing disappeared before it; pool after pool of water went as if by magic, no one knew where. The pavements were dry, parched as in the very heat of summer. The streets, which at that hour of night were generally peopled with a living multitude, were empty. A desertion like that in times of pestilence had come over them; and the cold winter wind went rushing madly on its course, moaning and sighing and howling through old buildings and dark entries and over chimney-tops, its own wild voice drowning the groans which it wrung from thousands.

What a night it was for those who owned no home but the world, no shelter but the sky! Into what wretched holes they shrank!—in stables, in kennels, in sheds with beasts. Shivering boys gathered at the doors of blacksmiths' shops, and looked wistfully in at the red fire; and wretched old men stole up to the windows of rich dwellings, and peered in, hoping to cheer their icy hearts by the comfort which they saw within. Oh! could we but distinguish the sighs and groans which mingle in the wild melody of the north

wind, as it comes careering along, how mournfully sad would be the sound !

The forbidding appearance of the weather was not without its influence upon a small elderly lady who dwelt in a snug house near the Bowery, and who was sitting in a state of nervous expectation in a high chair with a straight narrow back, in a small back parlor communicating with a front one by folding-doors. This was Mrs. Dow, the widow-elect of Wilkins. She was a small, thin woman, tough, wiry, and not unlike a bundle of rattans ; and many years ago, it is probable, had been better-looking. She was to be pitied if she had not. But Time generally has his own way with the old and young. He digs the graves of the first, and blights the bright promise of the second ; and the widow had not escaped the general doom. She had resisted to the last ; but the old gentleman of the scythe and hour-glass, finding her likely to prove a hard customer, and having plenty of leisure on his hands, instead of a storm commenced a siege ; and at the end of fifty years Mrs. Dow had withered down into the small elderly lady just described. When she fell in with Wilkins, she had retired from the combat, and, though a little excitable, had betaken herself to meekness and prayer-meetings. Meek widows, however, are very apt to fancy reckless, dare-devil men, especially if the widows are a little pious. It gives a flavor to their existence.

The whole room had an air of comfort, which was increased by contrast with the howling of the blast without. Heavy curtains reached the floor, and shut out the cold air. A bright fire burnt cheerily in the grate, before which stood an arm-chair, at present unoccupied. The mantel-piece was decorated with two plated candlesticks of a spiral form. From the top of each, a rose of green paper peeped coyly out, and between them two unknown shells,

brought from a distant sea, were recumbent on a bed of green paper, carefully scalloped out at the edges. Over these, in a very small gilt frame, hung the profile of the late Mr. Dow, cut from a card, with a piece of black silk introduced in the rear, and showing off to all advantage a pug nose and an ample shirt-ruffle. The chairs in the room were all of mahogany, and were Mrs. Dow's own. In truth, the widow was well to do in the world, and it was her wealth which had excited the cupidity of Wilkins.

As she sat in her high-backed chair, she glanced restlessly at the clock and then about the room. There was a speck of dust on one of the chairs, so she got up and wiped it off with her handkerchief. 'Ah me!' said she, pausing before a looking-glass, and tenderly adjusting a very small curl, which peeped from under her cap. 'Our present state of existence is a very precarious one—very.' And having uttered this moral apothegm, Mrs. Dow bestowed a few small attentions on a fierce little ribbon, done up as a bow, which was perched on the highest elevation of her cap. 'Very precarious indeed,' continued she, turning first one side of her head to the glass, then the other, and making a desperate effort to catch a transient glance of the back of her neck. 'The world's a fleeting show; life's a dream. Gracious me! how the wind whistles!'

Having finished her occupation, Mrs. Dow drew a large chair near the fire, sank gently into it, and fixed her eyes pathetically on the profile of the late Mr. D. 'Ah! he was a dear good man—he was!' and she shook her head mournfully at the profile. Then she thought how that respectable gentleman, one pleasant evening, had thrown himself into that very arm-chair, and placing a small stool under each foot, and quietly observing that he intended to take a long nap, had subsided into a calm apoplexy, and was now

finishing his nap in a neighboring church-yard — a neat marble slab, surmounted by two cherubs, beautifully carved with curly hair, and wings growing out of the back of their necks, being carefully placed over him, to keep him comfortable.

‘He *was* a nice man, Mr. Dow ; so kind — and he died so easy ! It was *so* like him — so considerate ! Never gave trouble. Poor dear ! he always wanted to die on a sudden ; and always hoped he would n’t suffer when he died. Providence was kind to him, very ; he was gratified in both wishes. I’m sure he had every reason to be thankful.’

A very faint cough, and a slight snuffle in the room, startled the speaker.

‘Who’s there ?’ demanded she, in a tremulous tone, and not altogether without apprehension that the late Mr. Dow, encouraged by her reflections, and finding his quarters in the church-yard a little cool, might have dropped in to warm himself at her fire.

‘Me,’ replied a solemn voice, emanating from a man-servant, clad in a broad-skirted snuff-colored coat and rusty unmentionables.

‘Oh ! it’s *you*, Aaron, is it ?’ said the lady, sharply, as the man-servant advanced, and paused, with a puzzled look, in the middle of room. ‘What brings you here ? What do you want ?’

The man-servant uttered the single word ‘sugar,’ at the same time extending toward the relict of the late Mr. Dow a receptacle for that article, of the smallest credible dimensions.

‘Sugar !’

The man nodded.

‘Well, I never, in all my born days ! It was filled not — (let me see : Monday, Friday, Tuesday, Monday, Friday) —

not ten days ago, and more sugar! It's sinful!' and Mrs. Dow raised her eyes to heaven in pious wrath. 'Many poor wretches,' continued she, fumbling in her pocket for the keys, '*never* have sugar in their tea. That idea should make this little cup last a fortnight at least. You have n't a proper spirit, Aaron. If you had, the thought of the poor starving beggar in the street would sweeten your tea almost without sugar. I'm sure of it.'

The man-servant seemed to entertain a different opinion; but as Mrs. Dow took the cup from his hand, and proceeded to fill it, he kept his thoughts to himself.

'There,' said the lady, a little red in the face, from bending over the sugar-barrel, and locking the door of the closet, 'take that, and I hope you'll remember what I have said.'

'I will,' said the man, moving toward the door.

'Stop, Aaron. What did you give the lame boy, with a sick mother and three small sisters, when he called to-day?'

'Two cold 'taters, and an inion,' said Aaron.

'That's right. Always assist the poor;' and Mrs. Dow looked blandly at the solemn domestic. 'When he comes again, you may inquire how his poor mother is. You need n't give him any thing to-day. It might encourage gluttony; and gluttony, you know, is one of the great cardinal sins spoken against in Scripture.'

'Yes,' said the man-servant, shifting his weight from one leg to the other.

'How it delights one to have done a charitable act!' said Mrs. Dow. 'Do n't you feel it, Aaron?'

'Is it a queer feeling about here?' asked the man-servant, pressing his fingers with an air of profound investigation in various parts of his abdomen. 'A sort of emptiness?'

'It's delightful!' ejaculated the widow, her face glowing with benevolence toward the whole human race, and toward

lame boys with sick mothers and young sisters in particular.

'Then I do n't feel it,' said Aaron; and he shook his head disconsolately: 'I thought I did, but it could n't 'a' been. It must ha' been wind in the stomach.'

Mrs. Dow paid no attention to this matter-of-fact remark, but requested him to 'think of that sick mother and them hungry children, when they sat down to the meal which her bounty had provided.'

'I do think on 'em,' replied Aaron, looking hard at the small sugar-cup, and edging off toward the kitchen.

'How the grateful tears will fill their eyes——'

'Won't they!' ejaculated Aaron; 'especially if they ventur' to eat that 'ere inion. It was a raw von.'

Mrs. Dow drew herself up with dignity, and told the manservant that he might withdraw.

Aaron was already at the door, when suddenly he paused, and smoothing his hair straight over his forehead with his left hand, made a step or two toward the centre of the room, and look earnestly in the fire. As these preparations generally indicated something, Mrs. Dow asked, sharply: 'Well, what now?'

'*In* this evening?' said Aaron, with some vivacity, but making no other motion than a slight questioning nod of the head.

'In!' replied the widow, with a slight increase of shrillness; 'of *course* I'm in.'

'To every body?' demanded Aaron, in the same tone.

'Yes, every body.'

'That Wilkins, too?'

'Of course to Mr. Wilkins. Why not?' and now Mrs. Dow's voice became a little louder, and a little sharper.

‘Oh! no reason in the world — none at all,’ replied the man-servant; ‘but might I venture?’

Mrs. Dow paused to reflect; and then, having made up her mind that an elderly man-servant in drabs was not likely to venture too far, she considerably assented.

‘Well, then,’ exclaimed Aaron, advancing, and extending his right hand in the energy of his speech, ‘that chap Wilkins — you should guard ag’in’ him: he’s an owdacious cha-racter!’

‘Aaron!’ exclaimed the lady, standing bolt upright; ‘you alarm me! Speak! What have you learned? What do you know?’

‘Nothing,’ said Aaron. ‘I wish I did know something;’ and he shook his head mournfully; ‘but I *suspects* ;’ and now the shake of his head was ominous.

‘What do you suspect? I can’t bear suspense. It excites me to a degree!’ And to prove this last assertion, she seized the man-servant by the coat collar, and shook him violently.

The man waited until she had finished, and then adjusted his collar. ‘I suspect a great deal — a *very* great deal!’ said he, looking impressively into the eyes of his mistress, and sinking his voice. ‘I know it by a sign that never fails.’

Small women are sometimes nervous, and nervous women have been known to faint; but Mrs. Dow did not, although her voice was a little quickened in volubility, as she said: ‘What is it, Aaron? — quick — tell me — do n’t keep me a-dying here — oh my! oh my!’

‘The sign,’ replied Aaron, confidently, ‘I know it by, is the cut of his eye.’

‘The what?’

‘The cut of his eye,’ reiterated Aaron, positively; com-

pressing his lips, and looking at his mistress with a stern, impressive air. 'Try a man on all tacks, and they may fail; but let me get the cut of his eye, and I knows him at once.'

'Aaron,' replied the widow, recovering instantly, 'the cut of Mr. Wilkins's eye is no ground for suspicion against his respectability. I have never seen any thing at all unpleasant in their expression, or denoting a bad character; and if he does sometimes sit with his feet on the new brass fender, and occasionally spit on the clean grate, these are trifles — flaws in a gem — spots on the sun. You must from this time cease your remarks respecting both his eyes and character, as he's a friend of mine — a very *particular* friend.'

Mrs. Dow coughed as she uttered these last words, and the man-servant, who had nothing to justify his suspicion against Wilkins except a general dislike to him, drew back abashed.

'You may go.'

Aaron cast a disconsolate look at the widow, shook his head, and left the room.

'She's a gone horse!' said he, as he shut the door, 'or my name's not Aaron!'

A new course, however, was given to the current of his ideas by a knock at the door.

'That's him, I know,' muttered he, showing his displeasure in the only manner that he dared, by obeying the summons as slowly as possible. 'If I did n't know she was a-listenin', he would n't get in now, nuther.'

With this muttered expression of dissatisfaction, he opened the door.

'Is your mistress at home?' demanded a voice which he anticipated, although the darkness prevented him from seeing his person.

‘What’s your name?’ demanded Aaron. ‘I never let no body in without their name.’

The man made no reply, but thrust the door violently open, jamming Aaron between it and the wall, to the great annoyance of his person, which, being somewhat prominent in the region of the stomach, found the compass of six inches into which he was pressed rather more inconvenient than otherwise.

‘D—n you! would you let a man stand there and freeze?’ said the other, as he stepped in. ‘Do n’t you hear the wind howling as if hell was riding on it? Is this a night to ask a man’s name? Get to your mistress and tell her I’m here. Shut the door, and be quick!’

‘You need n’t wait for that,’ said Aaron, sulkily, passing his hand over the aggrieved parts of his body. ‘She’s been a-waiting for you these three nights. There’s the door; you can go in.’

‘So you’ve found out who I am, have you? It’s well you did; or it might have been put in your head in a way you would n’t have liked so well.’

As he said this, Wilkins turned from him, and going to the room door, opened it, went in, and shut it after him. As soon as the door closed, Aaron advanced, shook his fist violently at the third panel three successive times; indulged in several strange and uncouth distortions of the face, indicative of bitter hostility; then quietly went to the kitchen to communicate his troubles and suspicions to an elderly female with projecting teeth and red hair, who officiated as cook.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Wilkins entered the room, he strode directly to the fire, and held his hands in the flame. Cold, stiff, with his uncombed hair hanging loosely about his face, his cheeks hollow, and his eyes sunken, he seemed the very picture of exhaustion. It had been a weary day for him. The whole of the previous night he had passed without sleep. He had paced his room over and over again; he had counted every hour: he had watched the dark gloom of night as it gradually mellowed into day, and then the golden halo of morning as it shot up in the east, growing richer and richer, until the bright sun came flashing over the house-tops. Stragglers began to pass his window in the early gray of the morning; then they became more numerous, and then the steady tramp of feet told him that the day was begun, and that the thousands who were to strive and struggle for bread had donned their harness for the labor: yet, like one in a dream, the wretched man remained in his room. Strange and unconnected fancies and forms and figures flitted to and fro in his mind. Higgs, his wife, the attorney, presented themselves, sometimes in turn, sometimes together, sometimes whirling and flitting to and fro, and then vanishing as in a mist. But amid all was a vague, indefinable consciousness that there was something on hand; a strong oppressive feeling that there was something to be done which demanded immediate action, and that he must be up and busy. Still it was not until late in the morning that he went out into the street. The cold biting air, as it rushed over his hot forehead, partly

brought him to himself; but no sooner had he locked the door of his house than he fled from it with a feeling of terror. An indefinable guilt, a secret dread of he knew not what, seemed connected with it. The want of rest and mental anxiety had completely unstrung him, and he obeyed every wild phantasy of his brain like a very slave. A weary day it was. He wandered from street to street in a kind of stupid bewilderment. Wherever he saw a crowd stopping to gaze, he stopped and gazed with the rest. If they laughed, he laughed too, and then loitered on. He went from shop-window to shop-window, looking idly in. From one end of the city to the other he wandered that day.

He stopped once near a bright curly-headed child, who was playing in the street, and endeavored to coax him to him. The child looked up, drew back from the wild face that endeavored to smile on him, and shrinking farther and farther off, until he reached a corner, fairly took to his heels. Wilkins muttered something to himself, and went listlessly on. In the middle of the day he was hungry, and stopping at a baker's shop, he bought a roll, and ate it at the counter with a ravenous appetite. He threw a few cents to the baker, who eyed him with fear and suspicion, and felt relieved when he was gone. Several times he stopped in front of Bolton's office, looked up at the gloomy building, and counted the windows in its front, and thought how old and ruinous it was; wondered who built it; and then went off without going in. Several times he went to the corner of the street where he lived, and stood there, and watched his own house; and once he went to the window and looked in; but all was empty, and whistling carelessly, he went away. But as the day waned, this unnatural state of feeling wore off. His mind gradually recovered its tone, and he became keenly alive to his own exhaustion. The cold wind, which had whistled

around him unheeded, now became piercing: it stiffened every joint, and seemed eating into his very flesh. His own home was tenantless; and with little thought or reflection, he directed his steps to the widow's, where he entered as before mentioned.

He was too much at home, and Mrs. Dow too much accustomed to him, to note his peculiarities. But that night there was something in his appearance which startled her. He shivered as he drew his breath, and a shudder passed spasmodically over him, as he began to feel the warmth of the fire. From head to foot, flesh and bone and blood were all cold. It seemed as if the current of his blood were congealed, and flowed through his veins in a stream of ice.

'There's no heat in that fire,' said he, as he stood over it. 'More coal — more coal! The night's horrible.'

— The lady, without remark at the rough manner of her visitor, heaped the fire with coal.

'There, that's something like,' said he, gazing with childish satisfaction at the huge flame that hissed and roared up the chimney. 'One *feels* that.'

'Are you very cold, George?' asked Mrs. Dow, sympathetically.

'Ay, ice to the very heart; all is ice, all except *here*,' said he, slapping his forehead with his open hand; '*that's* on fire! But never mind; here I am at last, merry as ever, and gay as a lark. I *am* gay, widow, a'n't I!' said he, looking full in her face.

'Oh! Mr. Wilkins,' replied the lady, 'what a question! You know you are gay — *so* gay!'

'Of course I am,' said Wilkins: 'so gay,' continued he, setting his teeth, 'that I sometimes catch myself laughing until the room rings and rings. God! how merry I am then!' And a scowl swept over his face, as if a demon

had passed and his shadow fallen upon it. 'But come,' said he, flinging himself in an easy-chair and stretching his feet to the fire, 'let's drop this subject. I suppose you wondered where I was. Perhaps you thought I was dead, drowned, or had killed some body, or something of that kind?'

Mrs. Dow looked slightly confused, and then admitted that she had wondered where he was, a great deal, a *very* great deal; but she really did not think that he had killed any body, although folks did do such things now-a-days: but she did n't think that of *him*. Oh no! But she had been worried about him; very much worried, and hoped he had not been ill, for he looked as if he had.

'Yes, I have been,' said Wilkins, rising and taking a light from the mantel-piece, and holding it to his own face. 'Do n't I look so? It was a fever, and that soon brings a man down. It eats up the flesh, drinks the blood, and leaves nothing but the bone. I would have been down to that, if it had n't gone off as it did. I'm weak enough; a child might master me now.' He placed the light on the table, and sank feebly back into the chair.

'Poor dear!' ejaculated Mrs. Dow; 'and I did n't know it! How agitated I should have been at the bare thought!'

'Would you, widow?'

'*Would* I?' exclaimed Mrs. Dow, in a tone which was intended to indicate to all intents and purposes that she most certainly would. '*Would* I? Oh, George!—Mr. Wilkins, I mean,' and Mrs. Dow colored slightly at the lapse into which the ardor of her feelings had led her.

'Well, I believe you,' replied Wilkins feebly. 'One likes to know there is some one to care for him. This feeling of loneliness is d——d uncomfortable. It sometimes almost chokes one. I've had it often.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Dow, raising her eyes pathetically to the

profile of the late Mr. Dow, 'it's bad enough. I can feel for you, that I can.' And Mrs. Dow shook her head, until the small ribbon on the top of her cap quivered like an aspen. 'When one is bereaved, Mr. Wilkins, then one knows what one suffers; then one finds out what bereavement is.' And again Mrs. Dow shook her head, and threw a tender glance at the profile of her late husband, and again the small ribbon quivered.

'That's true, very true,' said Wilkins, scarcely heeding what he said; for a feeling of drowsiness was stealing over him. There was a rich enjoyment in sitting in that deep easy-chair, with the warmth of the fire gradually spreading through his frozen frame! A soft, luxurious languor seemed creeping over him, stealing from limb to limb, wrapping itself around him, and warming his very heart. His past troubles and suffering passed before him with a dreamy, shadowy indistinctness. The thin piping voice of the widow echoed in his ears with a lulling sound. He heard her moral reflections upon the virtues and resignation of the late Mr. Dow, as they dripped from her in a small, incessant and pattering stream; but his mind was far, far away. He saw gorgeous avenues in the crumbling fire; houses, arcades, palaces, cathedrals; then an arch gave way, then a column; now a grove of trees sank down—down. He made a faint effort to do something. He muttered incoherently in reply to the widow; his head fell back in the chair, and he sank into the deep, death-like and dreamless sleep of complete exhaustion.

When Mrs. Dow saw that he was sound asleep, she forbore to talk; and sat watching his haggard countenance with a look of deep concern. She stirred the fire cautiously, so as to keep it bright, without disturbing him: and she moved the light so that it might not flash in his eyes and awaken him.

The sleep of the exhausted man was almost as profound as the never-ending rest of the dead. Not a limb moved, not a muscle. There lay his hollow and sunken face, as if cut from marble—the light of the bright flame playing and flickering over it, and giving a strange uncertain expression to its very wildness. The strong man had wrestled boldly with his fierce passions. There had been a bitter struggle between body and soul; but flesh and blood had given out at last, dragging all his energies with them.

Long, long did he sleep; and patiently did Mrs. Dow watch at his side. When he awoke he was an altered man; refreshed in body, and with his energies restored to their former vigor. Once more he was resolved, hardened, and unrelenting; with one fell purpose in view, and with a stern determination to carry it out at all hazards.

The widow had not been unmindful of his other wants during his sleep; and when he awoke he found a table spread, and a large joint of cold meat on it, and a tea-kettle steaming away at its side.

Nothing could have been more acceptable to Wilkins than this sight. Saying little, he drew a chair to the table and ate voraciously. For three days his body had been the slave of his passions; but his physical nature was resuming its sway; and now he devoured what was placed before him like a famished beast. Whatever may have been the habits of economy with which Mrs. Dow habitually amused herself, there was no stint now; for with all her foibles and weakness, that savage man had really found a tender spot in her time-warped heart.

At last he threw himself back in the chair. ‘Ah! widow,’ said he, ‘you know what’s good for a sick man. When the illness is off, then comes hunger. It makes one ravenous. I could almost eat you, widow.’

‘Lor! how you talk!’ exclaimed the lady, moving restlessly in her chair, and assuming that orange tint which in widows of bilious temperaments passes for a blush. ‘You do n’t mean it. I know you do n’t.’ And the lady had every reason to believe what she asserted; for she would certainly have made an exceedingly tough mouthful.

‘But I *do*,’ replied Wilkins, for the first time in the course of the evening casting at the relict of the late Mr. Dow one of those insinuating glances which had heretofore been so successful in worming their way into her heart.

Mrs. Dow turned away her head, and looked into a small tea-cup with an air of the most desperate unconcern; though it might have been remarked that the small ribbon on the top of her cap was unusually tremulous.

‘And you are so snug here!’ continued he, looking about the room; ‘very snug. Ah, widow! Mr. Dow was a happy man! He *must* have been.’

‘Ah! George—I mean Mr. Wilkins!’ And the widow paused; and again her complexion assumed an orange tint, at the idea of her being alone with a strange man, and addressing him by his Christian name.

‘Call me George; *do* call me George!’ said Wilkins; ‘I shall take it so kind in you.’

‘Well, then, if you *really* wish it;’ and again Mrs. Dow paused to reflect, before committing herself upon so serious a point. She being a widow and Wilkins a single man, it was a matter requiring some consideration.

‘To be sure I do,’ said Wilkins, earnestly. ‘If *we* can’t be familiar, who can? If we are not married, we soon shall be; as soon as this cursed business of mine is done for.’

‘Ah! you men have so many troubles,’ said Mrs. Dow, drawing a sigh so long that it seemed to come from her very toes, ‘and so much to do, and so many secrets! It is n’t

right, Mr. Wilkins — George, I mean ; it is n't right. Now who would have thought it! — even *I* have never been able to find out what this business is, nor when it is to be ended.'

'It's in law,' said Wilkins, 'and you know what law is. If you do n't, you're lucky. One can never tell how a law-suit will end. If I succeed, why then, widow, in two days you will be Mrs. Wilkins.'

Mrs. Dow shook her head despondingly, as she said : 'But suppose you fail ?'

'I won't suppose it!' said Wilkins, earnestly ; 'I won't suppose it : but if I do,' continued he, drawing in his breath, and forgetting to whom he was speaking, his black eye flashing, 'let *her* look to herself! She'll rue it, by G-d!'

'*She!*' exclaimed the widow, nervously ; '*she!* Mr. Wilkins, is it a *she!* Who is *she?* Oh! I am so agitated!' This was doubtless true, for otherwise the lady would not have poured the boiling water from the tea-kettle on the smallest finger of her left hand, which she did. This slight incident aided her in regaining her composure, and also recalled Wilkins to himself. He replied rather doggedly :

'Well, this business is a law-suit. A woman is opposed to me in it. If she succeeds, I'm a ruined man. If she do n't, why then,' said he, sinking his voice and casting a tender glance at the lady, 'Mrs. Dow may become Mrs. Wilkins. That's the whole of it.'

'Is that all? Ah!' said Mrs. Dow, working her way through a crowd of small palpitations, previous to becoming composed, 'ah! I'm so excitable! I'm better now — much better. But it was a tender subject ; and I really believe, George, that I *am* a little jealous ; the smallest morsel in the world, 'tis true, but still jealous. I never had any thing to awaken the feeling during the life-time of the late Mr. Dow.

I never was jealous of *him* ; not for the tenth part of a single second.'

'I suppose not,' said Wilkins, fixing his eyes on the portentous shirt-ruffle of that gentleman's profile. 'You had no reason to be.'

'No, never,' said the widow, mournfully ; 'he was *such* a man ; *such* a husband ! Oh ! George, I hope you'll resemble him ! But I'm afraid you won't.' Which last fear was a very reasonable one ; for Mr. D. having been a short, fat man, with blue eyes and red hair, and Mr. Wilkins being a tall, gaunt one, with both hair and eyes coal-black, there was every likelihood of her fears being realized.

'Well, I'm glad he's dead !' said Wilkins, rising.

'*Mis-ter* Wilkins !' exclaimed the lady, starting from her chair in absolute horror.

'So I am,' repeated Wilkins. 'If he was n't, you could n't be Mrs. Wilkins. But I must be off. It's late, and I have much to do to-night. But before I go'—He finished the sentence by throwing an arm around the widow's neck, and giving her a hearty smack. Widows generally resist improprieties of any kind ; and it is probable that Mrs. Dow would have been governed in this matter by old-established precedent. But the consummation took place so rapidly that she had not time to rally her energies before she found herself a kissed woman. Some rooms have very singular echoes. The echo to that chaste salute was a deep groan, which seemed to proceed from the key-hole of the door opening in the entry. Be that as it may, it escaped the attention of both parties concerned ; and as the salute was not repeated before Wilkins left the house, of course there was no likelihood that the echo would be.

CHAPTER XI.

THE opportunity which the attorney had been seeking for years was at length come. It was strange that one so notoriously infamous could have gained an ascendancy over a man like Mr. Crawford, or continued in a course of hypocrisy and deception so long without detection. Often had he been placed in situations where he trembled lest his character should be unmasked, and his schemes frustrated; but he *did* escape. The rumors in circulation against him were whispered in the old man's ears; but he shook his head, said that he knew him well; had seen nothing to give color to such tales; that they were vile slanders, and that he did not believe them.

In truth, to strong natural sense and great purity of character, Mr. Crawford united a heart as guileless as that of a child. The very rumors that kept others off, drew him nearer to the attorney. His indignation was aroused at what he considered an unjust persecution, and strong in his own rectitude, he determined, as far as his influence would go, to let the world see that he was not biased by it. His friends at last ceased to remonstrate, but shook their heads, and said that he would pay for it some day.

There was one person, however, on whom these reports had their effect, and that was Mr. Crawford's daughter; but in vain she urged her father to inquire about the lawyer, to trace these tales to their source, and to ascertain their truth. He merely laughed; told her that she was a good girl; that he was sorry she did n't like the lawyer, and there the matter

dropped; and thus it remained until his sudden and dangerous illness afforded the opportunity which Bolton had so long waited for, and of which he did not scruple to avail himself.

When he made his appearance at his office on the morning after his interview with Higgs and Wilkins, he was so pale, his face so ghastly, and his eye so black and bright, that it struck even his clerk—a young gentleman not usually struck with any thing appertaining to the office.

During the whole of that long night his mind had been on the rack. His brain was teeming with cases similar to his own, with stories of those defrauded by designing relatives; of old men sent to mad-houses while they had their senses, and shut up with gibbering idiots, and men stark, raving mad; lying on straw in damp cells, while their relatives seized all that they had and lived in luxury; of those stripped of their property by artful men whom they had trusted, who had wormed themselves into their confidence, and, then sent them into the world—beggars. Hundreds of tales of this sort sprang up in his memory so fast and yet so vividly, that he wondered where he had heard them all. He recollected too that in the most of these cases the truth had worked out at last; those wronged had regained their own, and the wrong-doer had met his meed. He had endeavored to sleep, but his slumber was the continuation of his waking thoughts; and when he awoke it was still the same. He left his house and went to his office, and endeavored to attend to business; but he could not. Persons came to him seeking advice, or to inquire concerning law-suits which he had in his hands. Some he answered so abruptly that they left his doors, never to enter them again; others, struck by his abstracted, anxious look, supposed that some heavy trouble had overtaken him, and went off; and many he refused to see. He remained several hours with the door

locked, admitting none : then he suddenly started up, put on his hat, went out, and hurried through the streets until exhausted, and returning to his office, shut himself in, and remained there until late in the day. But notwithstanding his bodily restlessness, there was no irresolution. His course was traced out clearly, decidedly, step by step. He formed plans to defend every part of his proceedings. Old musty law-books were drawn from their hiding-places ; the law of Wills was studied over with the most anxious care ; its various changes and modifications were noted, and books of reference, reports, old and modern, were examined. Yet the Will was a clear one. It was a plain, simple devise of his whole property to his old *friend* Reuben Bolton, appointing him his sole executor, mentioning his daughter indeed in terms of affection, but also speaking of her as illegitimate, and leaving her nothing. There was nothing in the Will either abstruse or complex ; nothing to hang a doubt upon ; yet the attorney pored over and over it, as if all that was tangled and intricate in the web of the law were concentrated in that paper. He doubted on points of law, where he had never doubted before. He examined and reëxamined even the attestation clause ; compared it with the statute ; suggested difficulties and obstacles which were perfectly puerile, and which, in any other state of mind, he would never have dreamed of. There was scarcely a doubt that he had not raised, and was not prepared to meet. One thing only was wanting, and that was the death of Mr. Crawford. The lawyer haunted the house of the sick man like a spirit of evil. From morning till night, at all hours, he was there : sometimes in the drawing-room, sometimes stopping to inquire about him of the servants, and sometimes prowling at his very bed-side. The old man lingered for a long time ; but he died at last.

It was a quaint, old-fashioned room in which he lay — unlike the rest of the house — with low ceilings, and filled with rich, luxurious, but antiquated furniture; for he had a curious taste in such matters, and the walls were painted with grotesque and strange figures, engaged in some heathen ceremonial. Heavy curtains of a dark color hung from the bedstead, and from the windows, sweeping the floor. About the room were chairs of massive wood, elaborately carved, which he had collected with much trouble and expense; shelves, and book-cases too, with rare old volumes and folios, whose writers had long since slept with the earth-worm. The whole house had been furnished to suit his daughter, with the exception of this single room; but here he had indulged his own taste for the fantastic. By degrees, he had collected these costly and rare articles. And now, in that dark old room, with all this mystic collection about him, his life was ebbing.

His daughter was watching at his bed-side. She knew that he must die. But hope wells up from the bottom of the heart, in spite of obstacles. She hoped that the filmy eye would again brighten; and that the labored breath would again subside into the calm, regular respiration of natural sleep. How sad and dreary it was to sit there hour after hour, hearing nothing but that loud panting breath, with nothing to break the stillness except the low ticking of the watch, as it whispered its warning of time's flight in her ear; and the occasional, far-off sound of the church-clock, which seemed like a solemn summons to the grave! How anxiously did that poor girl watch for one look of recognition, or some little mark of kindness from one who had loved her as none would ever love her again! How often did she press the hand that lay near her own, motionless and icy cold!

But the pressure was not returned ; and the face which once would have brightened at the slightest token of affection from her, remained rigid and fixed.

It was late at night, and all was quiet, when the old man suddenly stretched out his hand, as if groping for something.

‘Helen, my child!’ he muttered.

The girl rose hastily, took his hand between her own, and bent over him.

‘I want Helen,’ muttered he, in the same indistinct tone ; and looking in her face with a piteous expression, which made the tears gush from her eyes. ‘I want my dear little girl, Helen.’

‘I am here, father,’ said she.

The old man looked long and earnestly at her, drew her closer to him ; then shook his head, smiled vacantly, and laid his cheek on the pillow, with an expression of patience and disappointment that made her very heart ache. He uttered something in a low tone, which she could not understand. At times he spoke of green fields ; of boys in their play-grounds. She heard him murmuring the names of old gray-haired men, who had gone to their graves long years before ; and speaking to them as if they were children about him. Then he muttered on, sometimes of one thing, sometimes of another ; but always in a happy, cheerful vein ; and sometimes he laughed ; a gay, joyous, ringing laugh ; one that might have burst from the lips of a young child ; but oh ! how sad from those of a dying old man ! By degrees, however, the straggling rays of intellect seemed to concentrate ; he spoke of more recent occurrences ; then he raised himself in the bed, and pushed the hair back from his face.

‘Helen,’ said he, in a strong, clear voice, ‘is that you?’

His daughter only pressed his hand.

‘You’re a good girl; God bless you! I’m going, Helen, and I’ve much to tell you.’ He paused. The cloud which had for a moment been lifted, again obscured his mind, and he sank back on his pillow. The look of intelligence which had brightened his face disappeared, and was succeeded by a blank, idiotic stare. Hour after hour his daughter continued to watch, until late in the night, when, suddenly, the respiration of the sick man became deeper and more labored; then came one long, rattling, gurgling breath. His daughter rose, and bent over him: another deep, deep breath came; a pause; then one sharp, convulsive, quivering gasp; his head fell back; and all was over.

CHAPTER XII.

At about ten o'clock on the following morning, a short man, dressed in black, with a crape on his hat, walked gravely up the steps of the house, and rang the bell.

'I'm come to measure the old gentleman,' said he, in a sombre tone, as the red-eared servant opened the door.

'You're late in the day, my old feller,' replied the servant, looking from behind the door; 'the old gentleman's off; he won't wear clothes again.'

'But he will a coffin,' replied the man in black, 'and that's what I'm come for.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the servant, opening the door so as to admit him; 'you're the undertaker, are you?'

The man in black nodded, walked into the entry, took his hat off, brushed it with his sleeve, and laid it on a chair.

'Did he die easy?' inquired he, looking sadly at the man, who eyed him with respectful awe, and was at that moment engaged in an interesting calculation of how many gentlemen that same undertaker had measured in the course of the last year. 'Did he die easy?'

'Oh! very easy, Sir, very easy,' replied the servant. He went off a'most without knowing it hisself.'

'That must be a great comfort to his friends, a very great comfort.'

'It was, Sir, a very great one. It makes 'em all feel un common comfortable.' As he spoke, he passed his hand gently over his stomach, as if something there also contributed in no small degree to his own state of complacency.

‘They don’t all go off so, Sir,’ said the undertaker solemnly. ‘I’ve heerd tell of scenes that would curdle the blood, Sir; freeze the limbs, Sir; make the heart stand still, and all that sort o’ thing, Sir. Them people always shrink; their spirits shrink afore they go, and their bodies shrink arterwards. Most people stretches when they die; but *they* shrink. There was an elderly lady I measured last week what died in that very way. She went off desperate. She fit all her poor relations; tore down the bed-curtains, and finally expired in the act of biting off her own heel. Well, Sir, she was one of them that shrink. A ready-made coffin was ordered, and I measured her shortly arterwards. She was a five-foot-sixer. I went to the shop; no five-foot-sixers were ready. I returned and measured her again; she had shrunk, so that she fitted in a five-foot-fourer, which we had on hand, as snug as a pea in its pod. There’s evidence for you; the evidence of one’s own senses!’

The red-eared servant drew in his breath heavily.

‘Gentlemen of our profession see strange sights, Sir,’ continued the undertaker, growing mysterious, and sinking his voice. ‘I’ll tell you one. This is in confidence, you know,’ said he, looking earnestly into the two opaque globes, which appeared anxious to start from their owner’s head into his own.

The servant nodded.

‘Well, Sir, there was one man, an old man, a little fleshy, something like myself,’ said he, looking with some complacency at his own little apple belly, ‘but rich, Sir, rich as — as — as any body; a pious man too, Sir, quite pious; went to church reg’lar, sung loud, put money in the plate, Sir, and all that sort of thing; but he had the blesseddest long nose I ever *did* see. Well, he died on a sudden one day, and his nevvie, who was to get his cash, was desperate to get him

under ground, for fear he would n't keep, *he* said ; keep *dead*, *I*s'pected.' Here the undertaker paused, and looked darkly into the eyes of the servant, and sunk his voice. 'He ordered a coffin to be ready in twenty minutes. In twenty minutes I was there, and so was the coffin. We put him in it ; but when we went to fasten on the lid, up stuck that nose, two inches above it. The nevvv clenched his teeth ——.'

'The lid won't go on,' said I.

'It must !' said he.

'But it won't ; the nose won't let it.'

'D — n the nose !' said he, shaking his fist at the old gentleman ; 'flatten it — smash it.'

'It would be disrespectful to the departed,' said I.

'Then bore a hole in the lid and let it stick out ; he *must* be buried to-day.'

'Well, Sir, we *did* bore a hole in the lid, and the nose *did* stick out ; and he *was* buried in that way. Well, Sir,' continued he, looking cautiously about him, 'ten years arterwards I buried a young woman in that same vault, and I thought I'd look at the old gentleman's coffin. I did, Sir. The hole was there, but the nose was gone ; GONE !' And the undertaker now looked horrified.

'They say bodies moulders in the tomb,' suggested the servant ; 'perhaps noses moulders too.'

The undertaker cast a contemptuous glance at the unsophisticated man before him, and then answered :

'No, Sir, no, *Sir*. He was buried alive ; and as soon as he was left in that vault, and smelt its dampness, he pulled in his nose for fear he'd catch cold. This was the way of it ; and he must 'a' died in fits, spasms, despair, horror, clenched teeth, and all that sort o' thing !'

'Perhaps he was smuddered there,' suggested the listener.

'It could n't 'a' been,' replied the undertaker; 'that there hole was a wentilator.'

'Oh! it was, was it? Well, *you* know,' said the man, half apologetically, 'I, not being in the coffin line, could n't know that.'

'Of course not, of course not.' The man in black then thrust his hand in his pocket, and drew out a rule, which he deliberately unfolded and put under his arm.

'Business brisk?' inquired the servant, apparently desirous of edging off from a subject in which he found himself beyond his depth.

'Mournfully brisk, Sir, mourn-ful-ly brisk,' replied the undertaker, shaking his head, and again thrusting his hand in his pocket, from which, after a great jingling among keys and small coins, he drew out a penknife, and carefully passed its point under his finger-nails, which also were apparently in deep mourning. 'Scarlet fever is very prevalent among children, and there's a great demand for four-footers. But come, let's attend to the old gentleman.'

So saying, he shut his knife, put it in his pocket, and made a gesture to the servant to lead the way. In a few minutes they returned. The undertaker took up his hat, contemplated the crape seriously, then opened the front door, and walked sadly toward his workshop, meditating on the uncertainty of human life, and a sudden rise which had lately taken place in the price of mahogany.

The afternoon of the old man's funeral was a dreary one. The weather was wet and heavy. The rain came down in torrents. Sadness and silence brooded over the house where Death had been busy. The cold unearthly chill of the grave had stolen from its home in the church-vault, to claim the dead before its time. The servants moved about with

stealthy steps. Conversations were carried on below the breath; all was subdued, still, dream-like. At last the undertaker came, and two or three men with him. He held whispered consultations with those who had charge of arranging the funeral. His was the only hurried step; for it was an every-day business with him; and he was only anxious that the dead should be so treated as to bring more custom to his shop. His manner broke the trance of the whole household. There began to be a slight bustle; his name was called loudly by those who wanted his opinion on various matters of funeral etiquette; a long consultation took place near the door of Miss Crawford's room; then there was a laugh suddenly cut short for fear it might reach her ear. Presently she heard heavy steps ascending the stairs to the room over hers, where the corpse lay, and several voices speaking, and giving directions. The short, irregular, struggling tread, and abrupt, quick orders, told her that they were moving the body. Then followed a tramping of feet at the head of the stairs, and a rattling of the railings; then a thump against the wall.

'Take care, Bill!' exclaimed the undertaker; 'don't let it slip! Gently now, gently; h'ist the feet over the railing: that's it. Can you and Ned hold it till I get under the head?'

'I think so,' responded a gruff voice; 'but be quick! He's devilish heavy.'

'Spry's the word,' replied the other; 'but do 'nt speak so loud; we're near the young lady's room, and she takes it hard, I'm told. There, come on; let it come. That's it.'

The steps now approached the room and passed the door, and in a few minutes the body was deposited in the passage. A dead silence ensued, broken only by the pattering of the rain on the window-panes. Presently a carriage drove up, then another and another, and persons were heard in the

entry below, shaking their umbrellas, and stamping the wet from their feet. The coachmen in the street shouted and called to each other. One said something about a pleasant ride for the old gentleman, and then there was a loud laugh.

Helen heard all this, but it made no impression on her mind. The voices, the steps of the gathering friends, all sounded in her ears with fearful distinctness, but every sense except that of hearing seemed lost.

At last all was silent. Then there was a heavy tramp in the room beneath, as of a moving multitude : the loud voice of the undertaker was heard calling to the hearse to drive on. Then came the cracking of whips and the noise of wheels • and the owner of that house had left it for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

At about dusk on the second evening after the death of Mr. Crawford, the attorney sat in his office with his arms folded, his feet thrust near the fire, and his eyes fixed on the ceiling. A single candle was burning on a table near him, with a dull, heavy light, throwing all sorts of fantastic shadows and shapes on the wall. Light it scarcely afforded; for in the remote parts of the room was an uncertain kind of mistiness, through which every thing appeared strange and ghost-like. The outer office was even more gloomy than the other; being a kind of receptacle for old coats, shelves filled with useless papers, book-cases tumbling to pieces from age and neglect, and desks in various stages of decrepitude. It was full of odd angles and shadowy corners: the very place for dim figures to step suddenly out into the room: and with the sound of the wind, as it whispered and wailed through the loop-holes and crannies of the old house, it was enough to conjure up all sorts of dreary and mystic feelings.

Among this array of ruined and cast-off furniture sat the attorney's clerk; a gaunt, thin-legged boy, with red hair, hollow eyes, large knee-joints, feet modelled after fire-shovels, and hands to match. He wore a round jacket of snuff-colored cloth extending a few inches below his arm-pits, and trousers of the same material, reaching a few inches above his hip-bones. The coat and trousers had once met, but the boy had lately taken it into his head to grow, and his shoulders, in increasing the distance between themselves and his hips,

had carried the jacket with them. It is a matter of some doubt whether the boy's legs grew or not ; if they did, it was downward ; for they only increased the gap between the jacket and trousers ; and had not a pair of stout suspenders connected his upper and lower extremities, it is not certain but that the shoulders might have left the legs altogether.

Various unaccountable impressions have existed respecting the sympathy between a little boy's head and his hinder parts. Many think that his brain is best excited by the application of stimulants to the rear, and that the harder he sits, the harder he studies. Nature, in view of these impressions, is kind to small boys in making them tough in those aggrieved regions.

The attorney apparently labored under a delusion of the same kind ; for his clerk was perched at one of the cast-off desks just mentioned, with 'Coke upon Littleton' under his seat, and a volume of Blackstone, somewhat dog's-eared, under his nose. He was reading with intense earnestness ; not that he had any peculiar relish for the writings of that learned gentleman ; but being somewhat superstitious, he was at that particular moment under the firm conviction that a strange figure, with red eyes and green lips, was pleasantly peeping over his shoulder, and only waiting for him to look up to make some agreeable remark ; and that from a small window with one pane, directly over the desk, and opening into a dark closet, a stout Irish lady, whom he had seen hung the week previous, was looking out, and superintending his studies with a maternal eye.

For a long time the attorney sat pondering in his back office. Over his head a solitary spider, who kept later hours than the most of his species, was straggling along the walls, with an uncertain, irresolute air, as if half asleep or out of his latitude. Bolton watched him until he was lost in the

shadow of the room. Some chain of thought seemed snapped as he disappeared ; for the attorney unfolded his arms, rose to his feet, and muttered something to himself.

‘No shrinking now ; no, no ! He’s dead, stone dead ; stiff in his coffin ! *He*, at least, can say nothing ; and *she*,’ said he, speaking aloud, ‘let her do what she can ! Tom !’

The long-legged boy started up and thrust his head into the door.

‘Who’s been here this afternoon ?’

‘No body but the old woman,’ replied the boy, bluntly.

‘*She* here again ?’ said the attorney, compressing his lips ; ‘she’s always here, d — n her ! What did she want ?’

‘Nothing now.’

‘That’s something strange,’ said Bolton. ‘What did she say ?’

‘She said,’ continued the boy, looking full in the face of the attorney, and watching the effect of his words with a sort of malicious pleasure, ‘that the last time she was here she told you her husband was dying by inches ; that they had nothing to buy even bread with ; and that if you let that deputy-sheriff seize his furniture under his very eyes, it would kill him outright.’

‘I know it,’ replied the attorney ; ‘something of that kind was said, but I did n’t listen to her.’

‘Well,’ said the boy, ‘the deputy *did* seize the furniture ; and the man *did* die : and she came here to tell you, and to say that she hoped God would blight you in this world, and damn you hereafter. That’s what she wanted ; and when she had said it, she shut the door, and hobbled through the entry, laughing loud enough to split her throat.’

Bolton compressed his lips ; but no further sign of emotion escaped him. After a moment, he asked : ‘Has any one else been here ?’

The boy shook his head.

‘Very well; shut the door; lock the outer one; and if any one knocks, do n’t answer.’

The boy shut the door, in pursuance of his instructions; and Bolton stood until he heard the key turned in the outer door, and the boy seating himself at his desk.

‘She *did* say so, and he *did* die!’ muttered he. ‘Well, that’s her affair. Every thing was done according to law. Let her blame those who make laws, not those who enforce them. Now to my own affairs.’

As he spoke, he went to the drawer and took out a key, unlocked the iron safe, and after fumbling among his papers, finally drew out the forged Will, laid it on the table, lighted another candle, and read it from beginning to end, without pausing, until his eye rested on the names of the witnesses. ‘George Wilkins, William Higgs,’ muttered he; ‘George Wilkins? George Wilkins? — ay, George Wilkins; God! how I wish you had your throat cut!’ He folded the paper, placed it in front of him, and resting his two elbows on the table, leaned his head between his hands, and seemed to read the endorsement. But other thoughts were in his mind.

‘Yes, he’s dead; dead, in his coffin, in his vault, with the damp earth over him. He can’t come back. *He* at least can’t cross me. I wish one other was with him. I’ve got his name as a witness; and if he were dead, and I could prove it — the law is kind — it would let me do without him.’ He rose, went to the safe, and feeling in one of the pigeon-holes, drew out a large Spanish knife. He held the blade to the light, and seemed in deep thought. He tried the point on the end of his finger, and then clenched the handle with a firm, strong grasp. But almost at the same instant he relaxed his hand and shook his head, muttering:

‘No, no ; it’s too perilous.’ Replacing the knife, he locked the safe and took out the key.

‘It won’t do ; it won’t do !’ said he, shutting his eyes, as if to keep out some fancy that *would* rise. ‘Blood may come of it some day, but not now. But he has altered strangely. He’s as wild and fierce as a tiger. He even begins to threaten. Let him look to himself ! *George Wilkins*, I say, look to yourself ! I have you in my gripe ; and go on you *shall*, step by step, until the law has separated you from the only one who stood between you and crime. Once rid of *her*, once where I will sink you, then betray me if you dare !’

Bolton laughed as he spoke ; but God grant that such laughs may be few ! It made even the long-legged clerk stop his ears and thrust his nose an inch nearer the page in front of him ; and it rang through the room so strangely, that it seemed to the attorney that another voice had taken it up, and was echoing it. He stopped and listened ; but all was silent. Taking up the Will, he thrust it in his pocket, and putting on his hat and cloak, went into the other office.

‘You may go, Tom.’

Tom waited to hear no more. He darted from his desk ; clutched up a small basket in which he usually brought his dinner ; grabbed a ragged cap ; blew out his candle, and dashed through the dark entry, as if fully persuaded that the Devil was at his heels. As this was the ordinary manner in which that young gentleman took his departure, it excited no surprise in the attorney, who waited until the noise of his steps had died away, then returned to his own room, and bringing the light into the outer office, extinguished it and went out, shutting and locking the door after him.

He now directed his steps toward the upper part of the

city, following a narrow street until he came to a great thoroughfare, where he joined the crowd which poured along it in the direction in which he wished to go. He was so engrossed with his own thoughts that he did not observe several persons who spoke to him, and who, struck by his unusual air, turned to look after him when he had passed them. Had this not been the case, it is probable that he would have remarked a man who followed him, accelerating his pace when he quickened his ; now stopping to gaze in a shop-window, now at the corner of a street, now lagging to read some illuminated sign ; but always with his eye on him ; and always preserving the same relative distance between them. Bolton at last turned into a side street, and before he had gone a hundred yards the man was at his side.

‘A fine night, Sir,’ said he.

Bolton looked at him, but made no reply, and slackened his pace to permit him to pass. The man, however, seemed to have no intention to do so. The attorney then pushed on, but the stranger did the same. At length Bolton stopped and said :

‘If you have any business with me, name it. If not, pursue your course, and leave me to pursue mine. I will not be dogged in this manner.’

‘For the matter of that,’ replied the stranger, ‘the street is free to every body ; and if I happen to go in the same direction that you do, or to walk fast or slow, or to stop when you do, I suppose there is no law to regulate my pace or my pauses, or to prevent my walking wherever I please. You must know that. You are a lawyer, I believe.’

‘You have the Devil’s own coolness,’ replied Bolton, with a sneer. ‘I’ll do you *that* justice.’

‘Then I’m in luck ; for I’m the first that ever got it at your hands,’ replied the stranger.

Had there been light sufficient for the man who uttered this sarcasm to have seen the expression that passed over the attorney's face ; the black eye lighten up until it seemed to glow with a red-heat ; the compressed lips, which trembled in spite of him ; the clutched fingers ; he would not have stood there so carelessly without dreaming of harm, and might have wished his last words unsaid. 'Your name's Bolton,' continued he. 'You are a lawyer ; and if you are nothing worse, I wrong you, that's all.'

'My name *is* Bolton,' said the other. 'Well, what then?'

'You see that I know you ; and of course you may well suppose that I had some motive for following you.'

'Well, what is it ? I can't spend the night in the street,' said the lawyer, sharply.

'You've made many others do so,' said the stranger, coldly. 'You should not turn up your nose at the fare which you have provided so often for them.'

Bolton made no reply, but stopped short. The stranger, after hesitating a moment, demanded bluntly :

'Do you know one George Wilkins ?'

'I do.'

'And are mixed up with most of his concerns ?'

'What's that to you ?' demanded Bolton.

The other paid no attention to the question, but asked :

'Are you acquainted with his wife ?'

'I never saw her.'

'And do n't know that she's left him ?'

'No.'

'Nor where she's gone to ?—nor who she went with ?'

'No,' said Bolton, sternly : 'I do n't know the woman ; never saw her ; know nothing about her. I suppose she went off because she found some one whom she liked better than her husband. Find *him*, and he'll tell you what you

want to know. Women *will* do these things ; and she, I suppose, is no better than the rest of them.'

The stranger clenched his fist ; but before he had made up his mind to strike, the attorney had turned from him, and was hurrying along the street.

He kept on at a rapid pace until he came to the house lately occupied by Mr. Crawford. He walked past it once or twice, with a strange feeling of fear and irresolution. It appeared deserted, and the windows were closed, except one in the upper story, where a dim light was burning. The street was so quiet and lonely that it brought home to him a sense of guilt which he had not experienced until then. He fancied that he saw the figure of the old man standing at his own threshold to guard it against him, and looking at him with such an expression of reproach and warning, that it made his heart sink. But he was not a man to give way to idle fancies. Hurrying up the steps, he rang the bell. The summons was answered by the red-eared manservant, who, in his usual manner, opened the door just wide enough to permit his head to be seen from behind it, and in further pursuance of the same usual custom, looked at the person on the outside, and demanded who he was, and what he wanted. 'I wish to see Miss Crawford,' replied Bolton.

'You do, do you ? Well, you can't,' replied the servant, positively. 'The old gentleman's just under ground ; the young lady's most done up, and won't see no body ; and none of the rest on us feels like entertainin' visitors.'

Bolton deliberated for a moment upon the expediency of kicking the man ; but as the door was between him and that part of the servant's person which is usually the theatre of such performances, he merely bade him, in a sharp tone, to 'go to his mistress and to tell her that Mr. Bolton was there, and must speak to her on matters of business ;' at the same

time insinuating that if he did n't move rapidly, he might be prevailed upon to assist him. Although the servant was a fat man, and fat men are neither swift nor active, yet the idea of receiving the promised aid touched his pride; for he disappeared forthwith, and in an incredibly short space of time returned, and told the attorney that the young lady would see him.

The room into which he was conducted was large, and furnished in the most costly manner. Pier-glasses, divans, and couches of rich silk; tables and ornaments of various kinds, showed that its former occupant had been lavish in all that could add to the comfort and beauty of his abode. It was with a mingled feeling of triumph and misgiving that the attorney muttered to himself, as these things met his view, 'Mine, mine; these are *mine*!' At the far end of the room, at a small table, sat Helen Crawford in deep mourning; and near her a girl of about her own age, engaged in sewing. The young lady half arose as he entered; but her companion continued sewing, and did not even raise her head. Miss Crawford pointed to a chair, and without speaking, waited for him to open his business, which he did in a very few words; and after having explained the object of his visit, he said: 'Now, if you please, I will read the Will.'

Miss Crawford merely bowed.

The attorney looked at her companion, who sat with her face averted, apparently without attending to the conversation.

'I have no secrets which this person may not hear,' said Miss Crawford, interpreting the look correctly.

The attorney merely bowed, and then, as if nerving himself for his task, slowly drew the Will from his pocket, and spread it open.

'This is it,' said he, holding it to the light, and eyeing her steadily.

Miss Crawford said nothing; and the lawyer proceeded in a slow voice to read the whole. As he went on, the color left the cheek of the girl; and when he had finished, she stood before him like a marble statue.

‘Mr. Bolton,’ said she, with a calmness that startled him, ‘*that* Will was never made by my father. I pronounce it to be a forgery; and I’ll prove it so. The money and lands might all have gone; but to sully the pure name of my mother, to brand my father, and stamp infamy on myself, is what I will never submit to. The proof of my mother’s marriage and of my own birth is too clear, and upon it I pronounce that Will to be a forgery.’

‘Miss Crawford,’ replied the attorney, in a serious tone, ‘I can make all allowance for disappointed expectation; but these are grave charges.’

‘I know them to be such; and yet I repeat them,’ said she; ‘that paper I pronounce to be no Will of my father’s. It has either been altered or forged.’

‘There’s the signature,’ replied Bolton, somewhat daunted at firmness and energy from a quarter where he expected none, and which made him desirous, if possible, of convincing her before he went away. ‘You can tell whether it is your father’s.’ He reached the paper toward her. ‘The Will was executed on the tenth day of August last.’

The girl took it and scrutinized the signature; and so like was it, that she felt that she might be wrong.

Slowly and half unconsciously she read the formal attestation clause, until she came to the names of the witnesses, ‘*William Higgs, George Wilkins.*’

As she pronounced these names, the girl at her side started from her seat and threw a hurried glance at the paper. She was not observed, however, by either; and the attorney continued :

‘The Will was executed on the tenth day of August last. These men, William Higgs and George Wilkins, were present at the time, and saw it, and will swear to it when it is necessary.’

The other girl now rose from her chair, went directly to the table, and took the paper from the hand of the attorney. She did not look at the body of the Will, but only at the signatures of the witnesses.

She placed it quietly on the table when she had done so, and took her seat ; but had the others been less interested in what was going on, they might have observed that though her head was bent over her work, she was doing nothing. Her hands were clasped together, and her features were convulsed as if with intense pain. She remained silent, and did not alter her position until the attorney had finished his business and was gone.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FEW nights after the occurrences narrated in the last chapter, Lucy was sitting alone in the drawing-room. Since the lawyer's visit, her fears and misgivings respecting her husband's connection with that Will were working their way into her very life. Her cheek grew hollow and thin, and her eyes larger, deeper, and more dazzling; she became restless and uneasy. Sometimes she started from her seat, and walked with disordered steps up and down the room, until it seemed to strike her that this strange conduct would attract observation; and then she would resume her seat in silence. At other times, she wandered listlessly about the house, apparently with no other object than the vain hope that change of place might bring change of thought. And when, recollecting the heavy affliction which had lately befallen Miss Crawford, she endeavored to cheer her, there was something so mournful and despairing in her manner, and in the tones which seemed to well from a broken heart, that it made Miss Crawford even more sad than before; and after an effort of this kind, Lucy would often sink into gloomy silence, and remain so for hours. Even the servants noticed her altered appearance, and hinted to each other that 'there was a screw loose somewhere,' and that 'all was not as it should be' with her.

Her imagination was teeming with suspicions respecting her husband, that made her sick at heart. She tried to keep them out, but they *would* intrude. She fancied him handcuffed, a felon, dragged through the streets, with a crowd

following at his heels, hooting and pointing at him, with hisses, groans, and execrations. The number seemed to increase, the more she thought of it. They came from all quarters, in multitudes that had no end ; until all about him, house-tops, windows, steps and side-walks were swarming with a countless throng of faces. Then the scene changed to a court of justice, and *he* was arraigned there for trial. It was crowded from floor to ceiling ; but all were against him. Every eye burned with fury ; every tongue uttered a menace. None pitied him — not one ! And there he was, shrinking and crouching before the eye of the multitude, and looking imploringly at her to help him — and she could not ! And at the bottom of all was that Will. She pressed back her hair, and gazed eagerly around the room. She would have sworn that she heard his voice ; but it was all fancy. She trimmed the lights, and drew nearer the fire, for she was very lonely.

The door-bell rang. The servant crept slowly through the entry, and spoke to some one. Then he came to the room-door ; opened it, and thrusting in his head, said that a man was asking for some one, and he guessed it must be her, and wanted to know if he should let him in.

Lucy nodded ; and in a moment after a heavy step sounded in the entry, and a large man entered. He was dressed in a rough great-coat, with a broad-brimmed hat drawn over his eyes, so that it completely concealed his face. He walked to the middle of the room, looked irresolutely about him, then went to where the light shone full in his face, took off his hat, and stood still without speaking.

The girl watched him without a word, until he raised his hat, and then said sadly, and with more of disappointment than surprise in her tone :

‘So, it’s you, Jack Phillips?’

‘Yes, Lucy,’ replied the young man, gravely : ‘I came here, I scarcely know why. I went to your house and found you gone; and George either could n’t or would n’t tell where you were. I’ve searched for you all over; and by the merest chance saw you here as I was passing. I was afraid you might be in want or in trouble, and I could n’t bear the thought of that. But you seem quite comfortable,’ said he, looking around the richly-furnished room.

‘Yes, for a time I am,’ said Lucy. ‘The young lady who lives here has been very kind to me. But I shall soon be where I can earn my own bread. With a will, Jack, there’s always a way; and I will earn an honest living, if I work my fingers to the bone!’

Phillips shook his head; for he saw how wasted her face was, how dark, and deep, and glowing were her eyes; he observed the bright and feverish glow of her cheek; and a foreboding crossed him, that her hour of toil was drawing to its close.

‘But can’t I help you in any way, Lucy?’ inquired he earnestly. ‘You know I would work like a dog to do it. I need n’t tell you that.’

The girl approached him, and laying her hand on his arm, and sinking her voice, said : ‘Jack, I have something on my mind which has been wearing away my life by inches. I wanted to speak to some one about it, but I was afraid. I could n’t trust it with *them*,’ said she, pointing as if to the other occupants of the house, ‘and least of all to *her* — the young lady, I mean — but I’ll tell *you*.’ She looked about her, as if fearful of being overheard, and spoke almost in a whisper :

‘You must n’t breathe it to a soul. I need n’t repeat to you the difficulties between George and myself. You’ve seen a great deal,’ said she, half choking in the effort to con-

ceal her agitation, but you have n't seen all. You must n't come here again. It will be the worse for me if you do. It's no freak,' said she, quickly, observing an expression as of pain in his face; 'but it was about you that we quarrelled. He had suspicions of me, which I never dreamed of. They were hard to bear; but he was in earnest in them: and you were the man he was jealous of.'

'Me!' exclaimed Phillips; 'and did he tell *you* this?'

'Yes, he did,' replied Lucy, earnestly, 'and in such a way that I hope I may rest in my coffin before I hear him speak so again.' The tears gushed to her eyes, but she dashed them off, and went on. 'I only mention this, that you may know why I will not see you again. You are the truest friend I ever had; but I will not lay myself open to suspicion; nor shall there be even the shadow of a cause for slander. George was mad, I believe, or he would not have struck me. He was bad enough, often, but he never did *that* till then. I wish it had killed me at once!'

Phillips scarcely breathed as he listened. Every feature of his face was bloodless, and his lips were firmly set together. The girl went on without noticing it.

'Some one was at the bottom of all this, and there's one whom I suspect—a man named Bolton. From the time that George first fell in with him, all has gone wrong. He has grown poor, and his disposition has become changed. He never goes to the office of that man but he leaves it worse than he went. I've heard things about that lawyer, too, that make my blood run cold. He came here two nights since, with a Will which was to strip Miss Crawford of every thing she has in the world, and give it to himself. It was signed by her father; and there were two witnesses—George Wilkins and William Higgs,' said she, in a low tone. 'He says they saw him sign it, and will swear to it.'

She paused and pressed her hand painfully on her side; and Phillips could hear distinctly the rapid pulsation of her heart. 'Yes, that's what they are to do. They are to swear to *that*,' continued she, trembling as she spoke; 'but there's something worse than all that. *Neither of them ever saw him sign it.* As true as I stand here, they did not!'

'Good God!' exclaimed Phillips.

'It's true! before the God of heaven it's true! I say it—I, the wife of one of them. I *know* it, and I could prove it!' exclaimed the girl, wildly. 'Perhaps I ought to; for the young lady saved my life, and the very bread I eat is hers. It almost chokes me when I think of it. But, Jack, when I married *him*, I swore before God to love, honor, and cherish him; to stand by him when all others deserted him; and come what will, I cannot betray him now. Hear me out,' said she, holding up her hand to prevent him from interrupting her. 'Hear me out, while I *can* speak—God only knows how long it will be. Now, you must do *this* for my sake,' said she, speaking so rapidly that he could scarcely understand her, and grasping his arm with a force which was even painful: 'You must seek him out; track him from street to street, from house to house: no matter where or in what places it leads you; you must follow him up as if your very life depended on your finding him; and you must not give up till you *do* find him. Tell him all that you know. Tell him that Mr. Crawford's Will has been forged; that *his* name is signed to it as a witness; that there is one who can prove that Will to be forged, and will; ay, *will*—say *that*. *That* may have some weight, if nothing else will. If that fails, keep him away; shut him up—do any thing; *any* thing!—only do not let him have that heavy sin on his soul. The bare thought of what may happen to him is killing me. There is a weight *here*,' said she,

laying her hand on her heart, 'that is dragging me down to the grave. I have spoken openly to you ; more so, perhaps, than I ought to have spoken ; but you are my only friend now. You may be able to save him when I cannot, though God knows I would drop down dead on this very spot if I could ! There, now go ; you 've heard all. Learn what you can, and let me know it. Do n't come yourself ; but write. I cannot tell you what to do, or how to set about it. In *that* you must judge for yourself : but mark me well — you *must not fail* ! There, go, go !' said she, half pushing him to the door ; 'make haste, and I will thank you to the last day of my life, and on my bended knees I will bless you and pray for you !'

Phillips hesitated, and then said :

'Well, Lucy, for your sake, I will see what I can do ; but, d — n him ! I think the State-prison the best place for him ! If I had him here,' exclaimed he, clenching his fist, 'I 'd break every bone in his infernal carcass !'

Having thus given vent to his anger, he went through the entry, and out of the door, without even looking back. He set out, determined to find Wilkins ; to discover how he was connected with the lawyer in this transaction ; and if the fears of his wife were just, either by persuasion or menace, to keep him from implicating himself more deeply. If he failed in this, he intended to go directly to the lawyer, discover to him what he knew, and then to threaten him with disgrace and punishment, if he persisted in his attempt to establish the Will. But all this depended on the fact of its being a forgery. He had no proof of that, except the bare word of a poor, half-distracted girl. Yet he believed her without hesitation, and did not scruple to act upon her words as if they were established beyond a doubt.

'She shall not be friendless while I live !' muttered he, as

he went through the street. 'Poor Lucy! God help her! she might have got a wiser head, but not a more willing heart. Yes, poor dear broken-hearted little Lucy!' exclaimed he, the tears filling his eyes as he spoke, 'I'm afraid it's your last wish. I am indeed; but I'll do it. I'll find him; I'll stand between him and harm, as *you* would have done; and if he resists persuasion, by G—d, I'll thrash him within an inch of his life!'

He knew not where to look for Wilkins; but as the most probable place, directed his steps to his dwelling. When he came to it, he found it dark and deserted. He went to the door of the room and knocked. There was no answer save the ringing echo of his own blows. He then called Wilkins by name.

'What yer kickin' up such a rumpus about?' growled a savage voice from a door at the head of the stairs leading to the second story. At the same time, a rough head, garnished with a red beard of several days' growth, and bandaged across one eye, was thrust out, while the remaining eye, ominously bruised, was, by the assistance of a sickly candle, brought to bear upon Phillips.

'What yer want?'

'Where's Wilkins?' demanded he; 'I want him.'

'You *do*, do yer?—well, look for him. I thought the house was a-fire;' and the head and candle were withdrawn simultaneously, and the door slammed shut. Phillips thought it worse than useless to prosecute further his inquiries in this quarter, and accordingly left the house and went straight to one of those places which he knew that Wilkins was in the habit of frequenting. But wherever he went, his inquiries were fruitless. At some places he had not been for more than a week; at others, the time was even longer; and at none had he stopped within the last few days. From all

that he could ascertain, it seemed doubtful whether Wilkins had been at any of his old haunts since the night on which he had parted with him. One or two persons had met him in the streets within a day or two, but he had appeared so savage and morose that they pretended not to notice him, and passed without greeting him. They all spoke of him as gaunt, haggard, like one who had been on the verge of the grave. Further than this, Phillips could learn nothing; and he now determined to see Higgs, who (from Lucy's account) was also implicated with him and the lawyer.

He had little difficulty in ascertaining where Higgs was. In fact, there were few places where he was not. A dozen were mentioned in a breath, where he had been seen that day. The last person, however, had left him at 'Quagley's Retreat,' within an hour. He was greatly improved in appearance; having, as he said, inherited a large amount of property from a relative recently dead. Phillips did not wait to hear the end of the man's surmises as to where his wealth came from, and how much it was, and which were as correct as the surmises of a man who knows nothing about a matter generally are, but left him and proceeded to 'Quagley's Retreat.' He soon came in sight of the flaring light, with its red letters, pointing it out as the place to which that gentleman retreated; but whether when tipsy, or pursued by creditors, is a matter of some surmise.

Without pausing to knock, Phillips opened the door and walked in. He was unnoticed by all except the stunted marker, who stared at him until he had firmly established him in his mind's eye; and then betook himself to the duties of his office.

Higgs was sitting on a settee in one corner of the room; but so much changed in attire, that Phillips did not at first recognize him. His whole dress was new, and surprisingly

well chosen ; plain, neat, with no attempt at show. In his hand he held a glass of some kind of liquor, with which he refreshed himself during the intervals of a very confidential conversation which he was holding with Mr. Quagley. It must have been strange as well as confidential, for Mr. Quagley was completely overcome, either by the information which was entering his head or by the liquor which had entered his stomach. He nodded wisely, and blinked at Mr. Higgs as if an idea were kindling in his head, and would soon break out into a blaze ; but it smouldered away, and left nothing but mist. He shook his head, but it was empty ; so he took to his liquor in sad silence.

As soon as Phillips saw Higgs, he went up to him. 'I scarcely knew you,' said he.

'That's strange. Most folks are just beginning to know me, now that I'm in luck's way,' replied Higgs, gently raising his glass to his lips, and sipping some of its contents.

'Then the story's true about your fortune?' said Phillips.

'Ya — as,' replied Mr. Higgs, affectedly ; 'I've suddenly stepped into a small fortin. A respectable elderly gentleman has been keeping it for me these twenty years,' said he, crossing his legs deliberately, and holding his tumbler to the light, while he ogled its contents. 'He died t' other day. A fine old boy he was, that elderly gentleman ; a distant sprout of my family. I'll sport a crape for him when my hat grows shabby. Mr. Quagley, a rum-and-water — stiff.'

'Certingly,' said Mr. Quagley, bowing low ; for his civility had redoubled within the last few days.

'Stop!' said Phillips, abruptly ; 'you've had enough already. I've that on hand which needs a clear head. I've been looking for you these two hours ; so come along.'

'I'm in great demand since the death of my elderly relative,' remarked Mr. Higgs, placidly, and without moving ; 'but

what's all this about? Where am I to go? — what for? — and would n't to-morrow do as well?'

'No, it won't,' replied Phillips. 'You'll learn the rest soon enough. Come!'

There was something in the stern, peremptory manner of the young man which impressed Higgs in spite of himself; so he rose, and stretching himself, said:

'Well, if I must, I suppose I must. Mr. Quagley, you may let that order for a rum-and-water stand over till to-morrow; or perhaps late this evening.'

Mr. Quagley bowed low, and placed his hand where his heart should have been — on his stomach.

'Now go on,' said Higgs.

Phillips led the way into the street; but before they had gone many steps, Higgs came to his side, and laying aside his previous careless manner, said:

'Now then, before I move another step, I must know where I am going, and for what. I did n't insist on it there,' said he, pointing toward the place which they had just left, 'because there are things which are best known only to two, and this might have been one of them; but now I must know more.'

'This is no place to reveal what I have to say,' replied Phillips, bluntly. 'It's a matter of little consequence to me, but of much to you. You'd better come along. I'm only going to my rooms. They're not far off, and there'll be none but ourselves. For your sake, I want no listeners.'

'Go on!' said Higgs: 'but the interest you take in me seems to have come on you d —— d sudden!'

In silence they crossed the Bowery, and reached one of the streets which led to the East river. At the door of a neat wooden building Phillips knocked. It was opened by a girl who seemed to know him, and who, in reply to an

inquiry of his, informed him that every body was out except herself. Making a gesture to Higgs to follow him, he led the way to a room in the second story, plainly but comfortably furnished, with a cheerful fire burning on the hearth. A small shelf of books stood in one corner; a clock ticked on the mantel-piece; a few pictures were hung on the walls, and every thing wore an air of snugness and comfort.

Phillips placed a chair for Higgs, who had not uttered a word since those last mentioned. Higgs sat down, and Phillips, shutting the room-door, drew another chair and took a seat facing him, and so near to him that their knees nearly touched.

Still Higgs did not speak, but waited for him to go on.

‘I will come to the point at once,’ said Phillips.

‘Do!’ replied Higgs.

Phillips got up; trimmed the lamp which stood on the table, and, as if by accident, drew it so that its light fell full in the face of his guest.

‘First, I want a piece of information,’ said he. ‘Where’s Wilkins?’

‘I do n’t know,’ replied Higgs, laconically, and weighing every question before he answered it.

‘When did you see him last?’

‘I do n’t remember.’

‘Nor where?’

‘No.’

‘Can’t you tell me where I can find him?’ inquired Phillips, earnestly. ‘It was principally on his account that I wanted you. It will be worse both for you and him, if I do n’t find him soon. Worse than he and you dream of.’

‘If that’s all you want,’ said Higgs, coldly, ‘you might have asked it in the street. I could have told there, as much as I’ve told you here.’

‘That was *not* all,’ replied Phillips. ‘You shall hear the rest at once. A few days ago a gentleman in this city died, leaving a large property, and an only daughter, who would by law have inherited it. A day or two after the death of that gentleman, a lawyer called at the house of that daughter and claimed the property as his, and declared that girl to be penniless. He brought with him a Will to support his claim; a Will signed by the gentleman, giving his property to that lawyer, and stripping his daughter of all she had. This Will was witnessed by two men, who are to swear that they saw it signed by that gentleman. The names of those two men are George Wilkins and William Higgs; the lawyer, Reuben Bolton. Perhaps you understand now what I want, and why I could n’t speak out in the street.’

Phillips watched the face of his listener with intense anxiety whilst he was speaking; but not a muscle moved; not the slightest alteration took place in look or color; and when he paused, Higgs gazed in the fire, as if in deep thought. At last he said, quietly, and without replying to Phillips’s last words: ‘Yes, I remember something of the kind; Wilkins and I happened to be in Bolton’s office when an old man was making his Will, and he asked us to witness it. I forget the old fellow’s name. It was Crawley or Crawman, or some such name. I did n’t know till now what he’d done with his cash. It was d——d hard to cut the girl off in that way;’ and again Higgs gazed in the fire.

‘Then he *did* sign it!’ exclaimed Phillips, starting to his feet.

‘To be sure he did,’ replied Higgs; ‘I saw him.’

‘And it is n’t forged?’ demanded Phillips, speaking with the greatest rapidity.

‘Forged!’ exclaimed Higgs: ‘if it’s forged, he forged it himself. Why, who *says* it is?’

‘One who is willing to swear to it, and *will*. Those are the very words which that person used to me, at the same time begging me to use every means to prevent the witnesses from endeavoring to establish it, as detection and punishment were certain.’

‘Did that person know the young lady—what’s her name?’ asked Higgs, calmly.

‘Miss Crawford.’

‘Ah! Crawford! that’s it; that was the old man’s name. Was that person acquainted with Miss Crawford?’

‘Yes.’

‘Perhaps a friend of hers?’ suggested Higgs, in the same quiet manner.

‘I know she was,’ replied Phillips. ‘Well, what of it?’

‘Pshaw! don’t you see it all?’ exclaimed he, rising from his chair. ‘It’s a trick of the girl to prevent our appearing to prove that Will. She would scare us. What a fool!’

The red blood rushed into Phillips’s face. He knew little of law, and the thing seemed plausible. Could he have been duped, and by Lucy? Lucy had been deceived herself; he was sure of it. That there was no fraud on the part of Bolton, he felt sure; for the whole conduct of Higgs had been quiet and self-possessed. There had been none of the embarrassment attendant on detected guilt; and especially of guilt which involved so severe a punishment. He was convinced that the feelings of Lucy had been worked on by the arts of Miss Crawford, until they had led her astray. But how to undeceive her?

‘That Miss Crawford’s a deep one,’ said Higgs, after a pause of some duration. ‘How the devil could she find out that you knew us, and set you to work at us?’

‘That was easy. There happened to be a person in the house who knew all three of us. She accidentally learned

the names of the witnesses, knew me, and asked me to see you and Wilkins. *Why* she thinks it forged, is more than I can tell.'

'Who was she?' inquired Higgs.

'No matter who,' replied Phillips; 'I am not bound to secrecy, but I shall keep her name to myself.'

Higgs nodded acquiescence; and after humming a low tune to himself for a few moments, asked if he had any thing farther to say; and receiving an answer in the negative, he wished him good-night, and withdrew.

CHAPTER XV.

It was a bright afternoon ; and the golden sun-beams came flooding into the windows of the attorney's office, forcing their glad light through the dingy panes, and over tables, books, and walls. It was a rich, warm sun-shine, such as cheers the heart. Thousands of little motes, the very dust of the earth, were revelling in its beams ; rising and falling, dancing, whirling hither and thither, up and down, and sporting like things glad of life. The old room had a cheerful look that was not natural to it. The very spiders that had nestled in its crevices for months, startled at the strong light, stole off to dark corners, and doubling themselves into knots, seemed to wonder what was to come next. High in the heavens rode that sun, and over all came its glorious rays, shining in crack and cranny ; over ruined house-tops and in damp, dark court-yards, brightening the homes of the wretched, and gilding the graves of the dead. How many were revelling in its beams ! The rich and the poor ; the sick and the healthful ; the strong and the feeble. It was a glad sun to each ; and it shone alike on all. Gold could not buy it ; poverty could not exclude it. It is one of God's gifts, of which he allows no monopoly. It is to cheer the path of all, and to serve too often as fire and raiment for the poor.

It doubtless had its effect upon the attorney's clerk, who was lolling out at one of the windows, regaling himself with a prospect of two brick walls, and a distant view of a dead tree, which formed the back-ground of a narrow alley. He

seemed uncommonly merry, and not a little inclined to mischief. He ran his eye up and down the stone wall opposite; examined the dead tree; but nothing offered worthy of attention. He then rose, and deliberately threw several pieces of coal over unknown house-tops, whose jagged chimneys frowned upon the yard, in the hope that the jingling of broken glass might follow as an indication that this onslaught upon some unseen window had been successful. Being disappointed in this, and having caught sight of a small baby in a distant window, he was in the act of producing several violent contortions of countenance, for the desirable purpose of reducing the said baby to tears, when he was called to himself by a sharp application from behind, which felt as if it might have come from a foot. The clerk jerked in his head to see who had favored him with this abrupt summons.

‘Oh! you are at home, my bu’ster, are you? I thought I’d knock and inquire.’

This speech came from a stunted boy with a square mouth, who was leaning leisurely against the back of a chair. A small cap was stuck jauntily on the side of his head, and one hand was resting on his hip, the other being fully occupied in holding in the slack of his trousers, which had got considerably the start of him in size.

‘Where’s the Boss?’ said he, after pausing a moment to enjoy the surprise of the clerk. ‘I want him.’

‘Hats off is manners; caps off is manners too,’ replied Tom, saluting the side of the boy’s head with a small ruler, which sent the cap to the far end of the office.

The stunted marker was too much accustomed to scuffles and blows, not to be prepared for all emergencies of that nature; and the clerk was too much delighted at the prospect of a recreation of any kind to care much in what shape

it came. So, after describing several circles around each other, brandishing their fists and elbows in the usual attitudes recognized by standard authorities, by way of showing their science, at it they went, rough-and-tumble, over the floor, upsetting chairs, desks, and table; scattering papers, and bring down clouds of dust which had slept undisturbed for years. While the battle was at its height, a man's step in the lower passage caught the ear of both boys.

'By thunder! it's the Boss!' cried the clerk; 'jump up quick; put the chairs up, while I fix the papers and tables. Bustle! bustle!'

The apprehension of the clerk was one in which the boy fully sympathized. The battle ceased instantly, and by dint of the united efforts of the two, the office had resumed its usual appearance; the clerk was reading violently, and the stunted marker, though somewhat heated, was modestly sitting on a chair in one corner, with his cap resting on his knees, when the door opened, and Bolton walked in.

When he saw the boy, he stopped and looked at him, as much as to ask what he wanted; for few people called there without an object.

The boy understood the look, and recovering something of his usual effrontery, asked, though without rising from his chair:

'Are you the Governor? cos if you are, I've got somethin' for you. If you a'n't, I'll wait till he comes.'

'My name is Bolton, if you want me,' replied the attorney, eyeing him with some surprise.

The boy took off his cap and felt in the lining, from beneath which he drew a letter.

'Reuben Bolton, Esquire, Lawyer at Law, etc., etc.,' said he, reading the superscription. 'Is that you?'

'Yes.'

‘Very well; then you can take it,’ said he, reaching it out from where he sat. ‘It came from a gen’leman named Higgs; and he wants an answer: so just be spry in reading it, will you? cos I’m in a hurry.’

Having thus delivered himself, the boy thrust a thumb in each pocket of his jacket, and commenced whistling with a shrillness which caused the attorney, after a vain attempt to look him into silence, to hurry into the back-room and shut the door.

No sooner was the door shut than the clerk turned to the boy with an approving grin, and asked:

‘What’s your name?’

‘Charles Draddy, Esquire,’ responded the other, breaking off his tune only to answer, and then resuming it as vehemently as ever.

‘Well, you *are* a great one, you are,’ said Tom, strengthening his remarks with an encouraging nod: ‘There a’n’t many would a-dared to have whistled at *him* as you. He’s a snorter when he’s riz.’

‘Pshaw!’ replied the stunted marker; ‘he a’n’t nothin’, he a’n’t; but if you could only see Dick White when he’s tight up; or Lankey Jim, arter four cock-tails and a rum-and-water, quite weak—that’s all; only see *them*, and you would n’t even look at the chops of that ’ere ’spectable gen’leman in the other room. My eyes! he a’n’t nothin’ to *them*.’

Having given vent to his admiration of the two gentlemen just mentioned, he resumed his whistling, from which no observation of the clerk could induce him to desist, and who could obtain no other reply to all his questions than a nod, a wink, or a shrug of the shoulders.

In a short time Bolton opened the door and beckoned to the boy to come in.

‘Do you know Mr. Higgs?’

The boy nodded.

‘Well?’

‘Do n’t I?’ said the boy. ‘I *guess* I do.’

‘When will you see him?’

‘When I go back. He’s waiting where I come from.’

Bolton drew out his watch, looked at the hour, put it back in his pocket, took up a piece of paper as if to write; then threw it down, and said:

‘Tell him to be here in two hours; that’s all. Go.’

Notwithstanding the boy’s natural effrontery, there was something in the stern, peremptory manner of the lawyer so different from what he had been accustomed to, that he shut the door, and left the office without remark; unless a jerk with which he favored the hair of the clerk as he went out, might be viewed in the light of a passing observation. Having got in the entry, he gave vent to one or two unearthly yells, went through the intricacies of a dance somewhat between a Scotch reel and a nautical horn-pipe, delivered himself of one or two other frivolities of an extraordinary nature, and then quietly walked down stairs and took the shortest route to ‘Quagley’s Retreat,’ where he expected to find Mr. Higgs.

No sooner was the boy gone, than Bolton took up the note and read it again. It was paradoxical enough, and worded with the elegance peculiar to the gentleman who wrote it. It ran thus:

‘DEAR SIR: I’m afraid your cake’s dough. I think we are smoked. If we are, we’re dished too, and there’s an end of it. But perhaps it was only a fetch, and I’m hallooing before I’m hurt. If so, all he got out of me won’t in-

crease his wisdom much. I want to *see* you. When can I? Send me word by the bearer.

‘WILLIAM HIGGS.’

Unintelligible as this was, it was sufficient to drive the blood from the cheek of the lawyer. ‘Another blow too, on the back of what came to-day!’ muttered he. ‘Can it be that I am to fail now! I, who have hatched so much mischief, threaded so many dangers!—I, who have walked firmly where other men trembled; who never feared man nor God nor *law*!—I to fail now!’

He looked suspiciously about him, as if the very walls might tell tales. Could they have spoken, he might well have feared; for many a dark plot, many a scene of sorrow and of sin would they have disclosed. Men would have been astounded to think that a single individual, flesh and blood like themselves, could have worked so much harm. Men who had once been rich crept away from there beggars; and females who, glad and unsuspecting of heart, had accidentally fallen in his way, had gradually grown poorer and poorer, until, stripped of every thing, in very desperation they had become outcasts, without hope, and beyond redemption. Ruin, starvation, crime and death followed in the wake of that single man, like jackals on the track of a beast of prey. But he had long since become callous. He had dealt so long in crime that he thought the rest of the world like himself; that to plot, to deceive, and to beggar was the aim of all.

Within two hours after the departure of the boy, Higgs made his appearance. Nodding familiarly to the clerk, whom he had never seen before, he went to the door of the back-room, opened it, entered and closed it after him.

The attorney pointed to a chair; and no sooner was he seated than he took up his note and handed it to him.

‘What does it mean?’ demanded he. ‘It’s a riddle which I can’t solve.’

‘Is the young gentleman in the outer office in your confidence?’ inquired Mr. Higgs, in reply to the question. ‘He a’n’t in mine, and I do n’t want him to be.’

Bolton got up and spoke a few words to the boy, who nodded, and taking his hat, went out.

‘He’s gone for an hour at least,’ said he, returning and seating himself. ‘Now—that letter?’ Higgs could be as concise and clear as any one when he thought fit; and he gave an account of his interview with Phillips, detailing the conversation word for word.

The attorney listened without a single remark or a single question. The statement was so full, yet concise, so plain and straightforward, that it left nothing untold; and Bolton for the first time *knew* the character of the man whom he had to deal with, and the cause of the implicit confidence with which Wilkins had recommended him, and which he appeared to feel in his abilities.

‘That’s all,’ said Higgs, as he finished. ‘If I talked an hour I could tell no more.’

Saying this, he leaned back in the chair, and folding his arms, watched the countenance of the lawyer with a keen, inquisitive eye.

‘Did he give you no hint who this woman was?’

Higgs shook his head.

‘Have you no suspicions?’

‘None.’

‘Can it be a trick of this girl’s to drive us off? If so, it is flimsy enough. This Phillips might have lied too.’

Higgs shook his head. ‘Phillips won’t lie. I know *that* much. When he’s wrong, it’s because he’s deceived himself. All of us may be at times. If this *is* a trick, *he* do n’t know it.’

'Then, Mr. Higgs,' said Bolton, in a low, calm voice, which contrasted strongly with the excited manner in which he had hitherto spoken, and becoming pale and red in the same instant: 'Wilkins must have betrayed us.'

Higgs did not answer for some time. Then he said: 'I do n't believe it. He's not the man to blow on a comrade. He gets strange freaks, and is as mad as a bedlamite at times, but never mad enough for that. He knows *me* too well to do that,' said he, sternly. And again the attorney saw in his face that cold, savage expression which had once before made his flesh creep. 'No, no; no fear of that. But I'm puzzled, I must confess.' There was a dead pause, in which these two confederates sat looking each other in the eyes.

'You understand the law,' said Higgs, at last; 'I do n't. Let me hear the Will; perhaps I may think of something which do n't strike you.'

Bolton got the Will, and sitting down, read it from beginning to end.

'That's all right in law, is it?' demanded Higgs.

Bolton nodded.

'Cuts her off without a copper?'

'She 'll have nothing.'

'Then how can she *law* it? Law is n't made for poor people.'

'Perhaps she has friends who will stand by her.'

'T ain't the way of the world: they stand by people who are going into fortunes, not out of 'em,' said Higgs. He took up a roll of paper and commenced drumming with it on the table, while the attorney, usually so shrewd and ready, stood in front of him with his eyes fixed on his face, as if he expected to find in his cold, unmoved features some indication of the thoughts at work in his brain.

'Illegitimate, illegitimate,' muttered he. 'That I suppose is all gammon.'

Bolton looked at him with a sharp, cautious, irresolute eye, but did not answer.

'That 's enough ; need n't say a word more,' said Higgs, reading the glance. 'I suspected as much. Another little item in the general bill. But I do n't see the use of it. Suppose she *is* a bastard ? What then ? How does it help you ?'

'A natural child can't inherit.'

'Well, suppose *she* can't ? Can *you* ?'

'No, not without the Will,' replied Bolton. 'But once prove to her that she cannot gain, even though *I* do not, and there will be no object in her contesting the matter. There is no other kin or next of kin, for she was the only relative he had on earth. If I proved her illegitimacy, I would then pretend to feel for her desolate situation, and make her a present of ten thousand or so ; *that* would effectually keep her quiet ; for she would know that by proving I had no right to her father's property, she would also prove I had no right to the money which I had so generously handed over to her.'

'There 's a good deal in that,' said Higgs, rubbing his hands as if he fully appreciated the merits of the scheme. 'But can you convince her ? Some women are awful incredulous ; and if you can't keep her quiet, can you satisfy the doubts of those who 'll try it ?'

The attorney clenched his fist and struck it on the table with a force that made it rattle ; his eyes flashed ; and as Higgs looked in them, he fancied that he could see through them deep into his very brain, which seemed on fire, too, as he answered :

'No ! I cannot. From what that besotted old fool her

father let drop while he lived, about the private manner in which he was married, and about the death of those who saw it, and about his having lost the certificate; with none to thwart me but a silly girl, I felt as if houses, lands, and gold were in my grasp. For months I've had my eye on the traces of those who witnessed the marriage; made inquiries in every direction, and felt sure that they were in their graves; ay, dead and crumbled to dust. On that supposition I set to work; drew up that Will; waited till the old man died; went with it to the girl; advanced my claim, and boldly asserted her illegitimacy. To-day! to-day!' exclaimed he, gasping as he spoke, and shaking both hands over his head like a man in a frenzy; '*this very day*, when I am committed beyond redemption; when I have unmasked myself, and there is no retreat; one of these very witnesses springs up, as if from hell itself; seeks me out; says he hears that I have been looking for him, and would be glad to know what I want? I could have *killed* him! — I could have murdered him on the spot!'

He strode rapidly up and down the room, muttering to himself and clenching his hands together, as if he had the object of his wrath in his grasp. Passions fierce as a whirlwind had got the better of him, and it was some time before he could master them. When he did, he paused opposite Higgs, still trembling with excitement, but said not a word.

'Was the witness old or young?' at length inquired Higgs.

'Old enough to have been in his grave years ago. He tottered as he came through the entry, and was sick and ghastly, as if he had just started from his coffin to cross me.'

Higgs rested his head on his hand, and then asked, 'What's the punishment if we trip up?'

'Ten years' hard labor, at least,' replied Bolton; 'at *least* that. Curse him!—curse him!'

Higgs again rested his head on his hand and mused.

'Was he sickly?—*very* sickly?' inquired he, in the same low tone. 'Did he look as if he'd *go* soon?'

'He might at any moment.'

'Perhaps he will,' said Higgs; '*perhaps he will.*'

He reached out his hand, took the attorney by the collar, drew him down to him, and whispered in his ear: 'I *know* he will; *don't you?*'

Bolton started up, glared at him, drew back; his face became ghastly white; his heart beat till it could be heard; then the burning blood came dashing through his veins, over head and temples, and darting through his brain like liquid fire.

'No, no! not *that!*' gasped he. 'No, I cannot—I cannot! I can stand imprisonment, if it comes to that; but I can't die!'

'Well, have it your own way,' replied Higgs, carelessly. 'I've no taste for it myself. I've never dabbled in things of the kind, and as a general rule would as lief not; but when the State-prison ogles a fellow in the face, it's different; but we must think of something else.'

Bolton was completely unnerved. There was something in the cold, indifferent manner in which his confederate suggested murder, that made his very heart thrill with fear. Higgs, however, did not follow up his suggestion, but asked:

'What's the old man's fortune?'

'About two hundred thousand,' replied Bolton.

'Is the girl married?'

'No.'

'Good-looking?'

'Very.'

Got an eye on any one?' inquired Higgs.

'Not that I know of.'

'Have you a lovely wife or an interesting family?'

'No, none.'

'Then, by G—d!' exclaimed Higgs, starting to his feet, 'I have it! You must marry her yourself! *That* will settle the whole matter. You must saddle yourself with a wife; get the cash, and hush up all difficulties. She'll snap at the chance of marrying you. You'll both gain your end, and this awkward little matter will never come to light. I do n't pretend to be squeamish, but for my part I'd rather it should n't.'

Bolton folded his arms, and stood in deep thought. At last he said: 'It's plausible; and the girl's not amiss: but it's too late. The time's too short.'

'Pshaw!' exclaimed Higgs; 'what do you want of time? Go at once, this very day; before she speaks to any one about this Will; and before she has published you to all the world as a scoundrel. She could n't marry you after that. It a'n't a courtship; it's a bargain: although neither of you say so. She takes you to save her money; you take her to get it without a law-suit. Both of you understand it, although mum's the word between you. That's it! that's it!' And Mr. Higgs, in the excess of his joy, gave vent to a loud shout, and actually danced a gentle hornpipe around the office.

'I swear I'll try it!' exclaimed Bolton.

'To be sure you will!' said Higgs; 'of course you will! Be about it at once. It's almost dark; that's better than daylight, if you should happen to change color. If you agree on the spot, it'll settle the question of illegitimacy at once. Be oily with her. Women like a greasy tongue; but go it strong, and marry her at once — to-night, if you can. It's

astonishing how a marriage will hush up various awkward little matters. Where does she live ?'

Bolton mentioned the place.

'I 'll be there to hear your luck,' said Higgs, taking his hat. 'Good-bye!'

'Stop!' said the attorney, who was not so sanguine as his companion; 'where 's Wilkins? I have n't seen him since we last met here.'

'I met him once. He's a queer one. He looked as if he would eat me when I spoke of his wife, and walked off without even answering me.'

'Bring him along. I expect to fail; and we might as well be prepared for what's to be done next.'

Higgs assented; and having already bade him good-bye, walked off without repeating the ceremony.

CHAPTER XVI.

EARLY the next morning there was a violent ring at the door of Miss Crawford's house, and a letter was left for Lucy. It came from Phillips, informing her that he had seen Higgs, and was sure that she was mistaken in supposing the Will to be a forgery; and begging to see her, that he might tell her all that he had heard. He would not come without her consent. And that was all. She read it through, folded it up, and placed it in her bosom. She knew that Phillips was deceived, and there seemed no hope left.

'*He* has given out too!' said she, in a low, broken voice. 'God help me! for George has no one left now but me.'

She went up to her own room, drew a chair to the table, and clasping her hands together, leaned her head upon them, and endeavored to think. Thoughts came fast and troubled enough; but they gradually settled down into one strong purpose, that of seeking him, wherever he might be; of bearing with every thing, and of never giving up until she found him.

She rose up, took down her hat and shawl, and prepared to go out. She spent a few moments at her toilette; added one or two ornaments which Wilkins had given her long before, and which she always wore. There was little indeed to arrange; for her well-worn dress, faded and mended in many places, and miserably thin, showed that she was one of the 'very poor;' and God knows that they have little to do with ornament. But she remembered that Wilkins had once been proud of her beauty; and she was not willing to

believe that that time had passed for ever. Whatever he had fancied or praised in happier hours, she thought of now : and Hope whispered that when he saw her he might think of old times, might ask her to come back to their snug old home, and might say that he regretted the past, and might beg her to forgive and forget it. How her heart leaped at the thought ! How the mild, patient face beneath that old bonnet brightened ! And as she stole down the stairs there was a smile on her cheek, and a feeling of happiness in her heart, that seemed like the dawning of brighter days. She was a long way off from where they had lived ; but she hurried on. She felt stronger than she had for weeks, and her step was lighter. If the thought of a harsh reception sometimes crossed her, she chased it away. She thought that if she could but see him ; free him from the influence of that dreaded man, and know that he was safe ; even then, if he drove her from him, she would lie down amid her withered hopes, and die without a murmur, for there would be nothing left to live for ; and perhaps when she was dead and in her grave, and out of his way, he would think kindly of her ; and although she would not know it, or care for it then, still there was a sad pleasure in the thought.

But Fate has a strange way of interfering with the plans of all. It takes its course of mingled storm and sun-shine ; thwarting the best-devised projects ; blighting hopes ; bringing happiness where all was despair ; crushing bright hearts to the very dust ; but onward, for ever onward ; never pausing, never resting ; carrying plotting, scheming, restless, rebellious man in its giant arms.

At the very time that Lucy was standing in her little room, thinking only of him, Wilkins was pacing up and down the walk in front of his house, in a mood which, had she seen it, would have scattered her day-dreams to the winds.

Up and down that walk he went, casting fierce glances along the street, and muttering to himself. So wasted and thin had he become, — his eyes sunken, and glowing like two globes of fire deep in his head ; and his whole frame emaciated, as if the spirit were too strong for the body, — that his wife would scarcely have recognized him.

Presently a cart drove around the corner and stopped in front of his house. Wilkins strode up to the man, and shaking his fist in his face, said :

‘Is this what you call speed ? I spoke to you more than an hour ago ; and did n’t you say you’d come right off ?’

The man looked at him as if in doubt what to make of him ; then took off his cap, drew out a cotton handkerchief, wiped his face very hard, after which he rolled his handkerchief in a ball, flung it back in his cap, put his cap on by a dexterous jerk at its leathern front, and muttered something about his horse not having been fed, and that he had waited for that.

‘Curse you, and your horse too !’ muttered Wilkins ; ‘nobody’s in a hurry now but me — nobody but me ; and every thing is driving, pushing, tearing at me all at once. Come on now, will you ?’ said he to the carter, who, having jumped off his cart, stood staring at him, and wondering what sort of a customer he had picked up. ‘Jam your wheel against the curb-stone, so as to load without trouble. There ; now come along.’

He turned to the house, followed by the man, half sullen and half intimidated at his savage temper. Wilkins walked straight to the door of his room ; and finding it locked, without uttering a single word, or searching for the key, dashed it open with his foot. He thrust his hands in his pockets, strode to the middle of the room, and seating himself on the table, commenced gazing about him, whistling, and swinging

his feet to and fro, without speaking. The cartman stopped just inside of the door, waiting for orders. 'What am I to take?' he at length inquired.

Wilkins looked at him, as if he had forgotten that he was there, and wondered what he wanted. Then he sprang across the room, seized a chair, and flung it violently down in front of him.

'Take *that* — and *that* — and *that*!' shouted he, dragging forward article after article, and pushing them toward him, as if he would have shoved them over his very body. 'There's your work. Be about it, will you?'

The man seized the things, and hurried them into the street, glad to get out of the room. He went out, and returned several times, until he had taken all that had been pointed out. Then he paused, and asked what was to go next.

'Every thing! every thing!' exclaimed Wilkins. 'I'll make a home for her; a home such as those have who pray to God night and day to kill them! Take every thing; beds, table, chairs — *all*. Do n't leave a stick or rag, or a coal of fire to keep her from freezing.'

The cartman dragged the heavy table across the floor.

'Out with it!' shouted Wilkins, pushing it along. 'You're as weak as a child.'

He shoved it into the entry, and then returned to the room. The cupboard happened to catch his eye, and he jerked the doors violently open. A bottle half full of brandy stood on the shelf. He took it down, emptied its contents into a cup, and drank them off as if they had been water.

'Brandy's nothing, now-a-days. All *here*,' said he, thumping his fist against his breast, 'is so hot and burning, that every thing feels cool now. What!' cried he, seeing the man again entering the room, 'you want more, do you? More — always more! That's right — that's right!'

The liquor seemed to have maddened him. He sprang on the bed; dragged it to the floor; dashed with it into the street, and flung it on the cart. He muttered as he went, 'that if she did come back, she should find an empty house;' and as he thought of that, he laughed and shouted and swore, rushing around the room, seizing different movables, and casting them into the street; nor did he desist until not a thing was left. The cartman shrank from his savage eye; for of all the men he had ever dealt with, Wilkins was the most ungovernable. He obeyed every gesture, and did not pause until there was nothing more to be done.

'There — now go!' said Wilkins. 'Take them away; sell them for whatever they'll bring — no matter what; and take the money where I told you.'

The man went out of the room, mounted his cart, and drove off. Wilkins stood at the window watching him until he turned the corner: and then he went round the room, examining every part of it, to see if any thing was left; but the harpies of the law could not have swept cleaner.

'Now let her come!' said he, exultingly. 'All's ready for her. Let her come, I say; and she'll find her home what she wanted to make mine. She *would* run away, would she! Ha! ha! ha!' And he paced up and down the apartment, waving his hands over his head with a kind of fiendish glee, and laughing until the room rang.

After a while, he leaned carelessly against the walls, and said, in a musing tone:

'I've done my work well! All empty! all empty!' He kept repeating these words at longer and longer intervals, until gradually, and almost imperceptibly, a change came over his countenance. It grew less stern, but more gloomy, as he said:

'Well, old room, good-bye! It'll be a long time before

I see you again. I feel sad at leaving you, for I feel like a ship without an anchor. God knows where I'm going now! I'm cut adrift, and am floating on to where all seems black. Well, you are not what you used to be when *she* was here — and we had plenty — and she loved me. She *did* love me, poor Lucy! God bless her! And I — I loved her! But she went off — yes, she went off! — she went off!

He kept repeating these words to himself, and gazing vacantly about him, and at last sauntered into the street and went off.

How little a space there is between sorrow and joy! How much of our fate depends on the turning of a straw! Had Wilkins remained in that room but five minutes longer, what a change might have taken place in his lot! For not that time had elapsed, when there was a knock at the door, so faint and trembling that it seemed scarcely to touch it. It came again and again. The door opened, and a face, pale and thin, but exceedingly beautiful, looked in, and gazed timidly about the deserted room. Then a female entered hesitatingly, as if she feared a rough welcome; and Lucy found herself once more in what had been her home. And this was the end of all her dreams! Here her hopes crumbled to dust. She had nerved herself to encounter every thing but this; cold looks, hard words, even ill usage; but not this desolation.

The room appeared to have grown time-worn and ruined, even in a day. It looked as if years had passed over it since she was there last. The windows were dim and dust-covered, and the hearth black and cold. Now that their common home was gone, a gulf seemed to have started up between her and her husband which separated them for ever. All that had ever passed in that room sprang up in her mind as vividly as if it were even now before her. It was one of those

waking dreams, so full of sadness, in which the voice of the past comes sighing in the ear, conjuring up phantoms of scenes and things long forgotten, and touching chords in the human heart which seemed unstrung for ever. Things which she had never heeded she thought of now. She recollected the position of each article in the room. Here had stood the table — there the old broken chair — there an old chest. They were mere pieces of furniture ; yet they were part of her home ; and it made her very sad to think that they were gone. She recollected the many happy hours which she had spent in that room ; their many wants too, as they became poor ; how she had concealed them from her husband ; how he had scolded her for it ; and at the same time had caught her to his bosom and called her his dear little wife. How cheerful the old room was then ! and how gay he was ! and how merrily he used to laugh at its inconveniences, and say that it was a poor place, but that they would have a better one some day. Could this cold, dreary chamber, with its broken and dismantled walls, be *that* room ! Could the man who had struck her to the earth be George !'

While she was standing there, an old woman hobbled down stairs with a pail in her hand. She had lived for a long time in one of the upper rooms, and was very poor, and bent almost double with age. Lucy called her by name. She stopped, set her pail down on the floor, and leaned on a stick which she carried to help her as she went.

'Ah, child ! is it you ?' She always called her child, for she seemed so in comparison with her. 'It's a long day since I see you. And so you're going away, are you ? More's the pity ; for now I'll have no one to sit by me the long nights when I git the agy ; nor to give me my doctor-stuff ; nor to speak as if there was some one to care for an

old soul like me. As for *them*,' said she, giving an indignant fling of the elbow in the direction of the second floor: 'they'd see me die under their very eyes, and would n't stir a finger to help it. Out on them! I say,' and she knocked her cane violently on the floor; 'out on them! for a selfish, good-for-nothing, thieving pack as they are!' And again the stick came in contact with the floor, in a succession of short venomous knocks.

'And so you've moved away?' continued she in the same whining tone in which she had first spoken; 'and where are you going?'

Lucy shook her head, and said she did n't know; she said that she had been away for a few days, and was not aware that her husband intended to leave there; that she had come back and found every thing gone. 'Perhaps *she* could tell where he was.'

'No, no!' said the old dame, drawing in her shrivelled lips, and shaking her head so long that she seemed to have forgotten it was customary not to continue the motion for ever: 'no, no! he never speaks to the likes of me. He comes in and he goes out without so much as a 'Good day, Martha! how's your rheumatis, or your cold, or your corns? No, no; none of the little attentions as are so gratifying to old ladies like me. *He* tell me! He comes in; slam goes the door, lock goes the key; and then he walks, and walks, and walks all night long; and then, when morning comes, slam goes the door, snap goes the key, and off he goes for the day. *He* tell me! He was here half an hour ago a-loading a cart with things; and I went in and out a-purpose; and he did n't say a word but once, and then he called me a d — d old woman, and told me to get out of the way, or he'd break my neck. He *do* it! I'd like to catch him at it!'

The mere idea of his performing a feat of that kind

caused her to burst into a strain of vituperation which easily accounted for the little attention which she received at the hands of most of her neighbors ; as it required a pretty stout head and no very sensitive ears to remain in her neighborhood when she was fairly under way.

Lucy, finding that there was nothing to be gained from the old woman, whose key was becoming more and more sibilant every instant, went to several of the neighbors ; but they could tell her nothing more than she had learned already. One or two confirmed the old woman's story, but knew nothing more. The room had been shut up for some time, and Wilkins had not been there in the day-time. One man had observed him one cold morning some time since, standing on tip-toe at his window and looking in. He remained but a short time, and had not been seen by him since.

There was nothing left now but to seek him among his comrades. His wife's cheeks burned with shame as she thought of the low haunts which he had of late frequented ; and for a short time that feeling, mingled with fear, was so strong that it almost made her shrink from her purpose. But she thought of what he had once been to her, and all her old affection gushed up at the idea of the fate which would be his if she failed to see and warn him.

Drawing her bonnet so as to hide her face, and disguising herself as well as she could, (for she well knew that there were many places in this dark labyrinth of souls called 'the city,' where her beauty would bring any thing but protection,) and with a shrinking yet hopeful heart she set out.

Hour after hour fled by as she searched. At some places she received information which urged her on with renewed hope ; at others she was mistaken for one of those females whom God has made and man has blighted ; and only sub-

jected herself to the ribald taunts and sneers which are so liberally showered upon the wretched and broken-hearted. Through places which might make a bold spirit quail, that poor girl bent her steps ; for as her husband's means had decreased, he had become desperate, and associated with those even more reckless than himself ; men whom suffering had driven to crime, and crime to despair.

It was late in the day, and hope was nearly dead. She was walking wearily toward a house in a dark, narrow street which she had never heard of before. She had inquired its direction of several persons, who looked strangely at her when she did so, but gave her the information which she required. It was the last place to which she had been directed, and in spite of all her misgiving, thither she went.

It was a tall old building, which seemed going to pieces from age. The bricks had toppled down from the chimneys ; the floors had sagged ; the mortar had been beaten by the weather from between the bricks ; and the stone-work of the doors and windows was cracked by time and exposure. The windows were old and broken, and patched and stuffed in many places. Altogether it was a wreck, and stood in a neighborhood rank with vice and suffering. Opening from the street was a door with its lintel so cracked and crumbling that it threatened to fall on the heads of all who entered, and rendering it a matter of no small labor to open or shut it.

At this door Lucy knocked. All was silent, although but a moment before she had heard the sound of voices, as if a large number of people were within.

She knocked again, and was more successful ; for two voices, apparently engaged in consultation as to the propriety of admitting her, reached her ear. Then by dint of several violent jerks the door was opened, and a man looked out. After surveying her from head to foot, he told her to walk in. Lucy obeyed, stepping just inside the door.

It was a small room, and about as old and ruinous as the rest of the building. In the centre of it was a wooden table with two bottles on it, several dirty tumblers, a large piece of cheese, and part of a loaf of bread. Although she had heard the sound of many voices before she knocked, there was but one other man in the room; and he was sitting by the fire with his hands thrust in the pockets of his great-coat, smoking an unusually long and black cigar. He had a fur cap drawn over his eyes, and was contemplating a small stump of wood with intense abstraction.

The person who admitted her was short and square-built, with a wolfish eye, and a large swelling throat, which looked as if it hankered for a halter. When he had ushered her in, and after contemplating her with evident admiration, he said, with a slight distortion of the face, intended to be insinuating:

‘Well, sweet-heart, which of us do you want?’

Lucy shrunk from his bold glance, and hurriedly told him that she was looking for Mr. Wilkins, and had been directed there to find him.

‘Oh, it’s *him* you want, then?’ said he, with a leer. ‘He *does* come here sometimes, but he is n’t here now.’ Turning to the man at the fire: ‘I say, Bill,’ said he, thrusting his tongue in his cheek, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder, ‘she wants Wilkins.’

‘She *does*, does she?’ replied the other, removing his cigar from his mouth, and gently tipping the ashes from its end with the point of his little finger, as he spat upon the floor: ‘there’s a good *many* that does, specially the State-prison. Who is she?’

‘Some gal or other — *I* do n’t know her,’ replied the other, looking over his shoulder, and again scrutinizing the girl from head to foot. ‘Not so bad, nuther.’

‘It’s a blasted shame in George to cut and run, and leave her! It is n’t honorable, it is n’t!’ said the man with the cigar, raising one foot after the other to a shelf considerably higher than his head: after which he put his cigar in his mouth and smoked for some moments with great violence. There was something in his appearance and even in his crude notions of honor which caused Lucy to draw toward him, as if for protection from his sinister-looking companion.

‘How long have you known Wilkins?’ inquired he, speaking through his teeth, which were tightly closed to prevent the cigar from falling out; and with his face screwed into a complication of wrinkles to enable him to see through the smoke which eddied about it. ‘Young women don’t know exactly, of course; but how long—about——?’

‘A long time,’ replied she timidly: ‘I’m his wife.’

‘His wife!’ exclaimed the man, dropping his feet to the floor, jerking his cigar from his mouth, blowing out a furious cloud of smoke, and starting up. ‘Married to him by a parson?—all sound, tight and reg’lar?’

Lucy replied in the affirmative.

‘Then what the devil brings you here? Tell me that! Get out of this place as fast as you can! Come along.’

As he spoke, he flung his cigar in the fire, buttoned his coat to the chin, and taking her by the arm, led her into the street.

‘Are you taking me where I’ll find my husband?’

‘No!’ replied the man bluntly; ‘I’m taking you out of this neighborhood. This is no place for you.’

Without waiting for her reply, he placed her arm in his, and led her on until they came to a broad thoroughfare. Here he stopped.

‘Now, my good woman, take a friend’s advice. When a man has made up his mind to go to the Devil, *let him*; for

go he will, in spite of you. Your husband has done that, and you'd better not cross him. Above all, do n't look for him in such holes as that you've just left; and as you value your life, do n't mention that you've been there. All I can tell about Wilkins is, that he has n't been at any of his old places for a week or more. If I was you, I'd go to the police and inquire. Perhaps he's cleaned a house; stopped an old gentleman; robbed a mail, or something of that kind; and while you are wearing your little soul out, he's stowed away snug and comfortable at the expense of the State, with a man to wait on him and shut the door arter him to keep the cold out.'

Having thus delivered his opinion, he perpetrated an indescribable contortion intended for a bow, and diving round a corner, instantly disappeared.

Although his parting advice was that of one well acquainted with the world, or at all events with that portion of it with which he mingled, it had little weight with Lucy. For all that she remembered or thought of was, that Wilkins was gone; that all trace of him was lost, and all hope with it.

The sun had been glowing brightly when she set out in the morning. It had gradually ascended the sky, and journeyed to the west. The shadows of the buildings which had been thrown in sharp outline in the street had crept up the opposite houses; then the walls became dark, and the sun shone only on the tall chimney-tops. As it grew late, the streets became dim and gray; some of the narrow ones were dark already; and the last thing that reflected the sunbeams was a distant spire, whose golden ball gleamed in the sky like a globe of fire. At last, that too became less and less bright, and then black; and night set in.

Lucy's strength failed as her hopes faded, and with a weary step she sought her new home.

CHAPTER XVII.

MAN does not become a fiend at once. He does not burst into the world with a panoply of crime about him; with a heart of stone; a conscience scared, feelings dead, and affections withered at the root. These are the work of years; the result of long and bitter struggle. Every noble feeling, every warm impulse; all that is great and good and glorious in the human soul battles to the last, before it yields its purity; and when they are crushed, and sunk, never again to rise, he bears marks and brands, stamped upon heart and feature, never to leave them while life lasts. His triumph and curse go hand in hand; for when the heart loses its freshness, every hope grows dim, and has a shadowy fear hanging like a pall over it.

The attorney had passed the fiery ordeal, and came out of it callous to crime, but with a heart teeming with its own vague fears. Tormented by a thousand suspicions and forebodings of ill, he was in little mood for the business he had to perform. He never approached that girl, or even thought of her, without a creeping, cowering sensation of guilt and shame. He had experienced the same feeling in other instances; but it was rare, and never stepped between him and his victim. With his eye fixed on his object, diverging neither to the right nor left, he pursued his course. This was the strong feature of his character. Obstacles never daunted him. Distrust, suspicion, and disgrace thickened about him, but never turned him from his path. There were times indeed when rumors of himself came to his

ears that made his heart fail and his eyes grow dim ; when he sank his head in his hands, and thought of the past, and looking back to early days, longed to be a boy again. Yet none knew it but himself ; and to the world he was always the same.

He had reached a stage of his game where it became complicated. Each move involved so many consequences, connected with what had already been done, and with what was yet to be done, that it required a degree of cold, quiet calculation, which at that particular time he felt little able to give it. He saw at a glance the full advantage of Higgs's suggestion ; but it came so suddenly, and required such immediate action, that he had not time to ponder, and scheme, and brood over it, as was his habit ; and in no easy frame of mind he set out for Miss Crawford's house.

Just at the gray, dusky hour, when Lucy turned with weary steps and drooping spirits to seek her home, the attorney skulked out of his den. He walked slowly along the street, with his head bent down on his chest ; his hand thrust in the breast of his coat, and his eyes fixed on the ground. If he occasionally raised his head, and gazed up at the pale stars, which were beginning to flicker in the twilight, or at the gray moon as it floated through the sky, it was not of them that he thought. Sometimes he paused, and stood perfectly still, as if he had forgotten whither he was going ; and then hurried rapidly on for a short distance, and again fell into his old pace. He kept on, in lonely by-streets, where he thought that there would be few to interrupt him, or to read his gathered brow and anxious eye.

For a long time none heeded him ; for every man had his own little world in his thoughts ; and if a straggler glanced at him as he went by, he might have dwelt for a moment on the care-worn face on which his eye had just rested, and then forgot it.

At last a crippled beggar stopped him, and whined forth a supplication for charity. The attorney thrust his hand in his pocket, and gave him a small coin, scarcely conscious of what he did.

‘Ha! that’s something,’ muttered the beggar; ‘something’s better than nothing — nothing is better than starving.’

Startled at this strange exclamation, Bolton turned to look at the man more narrowly; and as he did so, the light of a street-lamp fell strongly on his face.

‘Ha! ha!’ shouted the man, looking in the wan face of the attorney. ‘That’s better than all! The lawyer disgorges — the lawyer Bolton.’

‘Who are you, in the name of Heaven!’ demanded Bolton, drawing back from his startling companion.

‘Who am I?’ repeated the beggar; ‘who am I? And *you* to ask that! I am Tom, the beggar: I *was* Mr. Thomas Nikols once; that was before I knew you. Now I’m only the beggar. Shall I tell you how Thomas Nikols became what you see him? *Shall* I?’ shouted he, thrusting his face almost against that of the lawyer, and laughing with a kind of devilish glee.

‘No, no; not now!’ exclaimed the attorney, with something like a shudder, and he hurried off. Long after he was out of sight, the cripple stood looking after him, and making the still street ring with his loud, mocking laugh.

‘They all haunt me now!’ said Bolton, drawing in his breath with a gasp as he paused to rest. ‘More than ever before. They crowd round me; and to-day, from morning till night, they’ve been about me. Let them come! They’ll not scare me from my prey. Do I not know that they are dreams — dreams? How my heart beats!’ He placed his hand on his heart, and felt its quick, irregular

throbbing ; and for an instant, a sickening sensation of fear came over him ; and the idea shot athwart his mind, that its pulsations were unnaturally strong ; some vital chord might snap, and he fall dead on the spot. For that single instant, his terror amounted to agony ; but that subsided, and he went on ; although, until he reached his place of destination, this was the uppermost thought in his mind.

When he reached the house, he stood and contemplated it, as it rose a huge, black mass against the sky, without form or outline, looking as if in that spot the very darkness had been embodied and concentrated. There was no light burning. The windows were closed. Every thing about it looked so silent and church-like, and Death had been at work there so recently, that it seemed as if the grim phantom still lingered in the precincts. The attorney held his breath, in hopes of hearing some one approaching ; but the barking of a dog far off, and the rumbling of vehicles in the distant streets, were all that broke the silence.

Feelings hitherto unknown began to creep through his mind ; and a thrilling presentiment of coming evil hung round him like a shadow. Suddenly, uttering a curse at his own folly, he sprang up the steps and rang the bell until the house echoed. This broke the spell, and he was again the cold, crafty man that he had always been.

He inquired of the servant if Miss Crawford were at home, and on being answered in the affirmative, without waiting to be announced, he walked directly to the room and entered. All trace of indecision had disappeared. He was perfectly collected ; his cheek was a little pale, but his eye was bright and clear, and his manner confident and unconstrained ; and he prepared to play his game with his usual coolness.

Miss Crawford was sitting at a table, with her face half turned from him, so that she did not observe him as he

entered. She was very pale; and there were traces of tears on her cheek. A book was lying on the table with a glove in it, as if she had been reading, but her eyes were then fixed on the floor. Bolton gazed at her without speaking.

‘I can see the old man in her eye,’ thought he; ‘but she’s worse; she’s suspicious. He was not. However, fine words go far with most of them. Will they with her? We’ll see. I’ll trim to the breeze. I’ll make the offer; but she must at the same time see that there is no choice, except to marry or starve.’

His train of thought was interrupted by the girl herself, who happening to look up, caught sight of him, and instantly rose, her eyes flashing and her cheeks reddening at the recollection of his last visit.

‘May I ask to what I am indebted for this visit?’ For an instant, Bolton quailed before the keen, scornful eye of that single girl, who stood before him strong only in the consciousness of her wrongs; but it was only for an instant; and he answered calmly:

‘I came here to see Miss Crawford on matters of much interest, both to her and to myself.’

Seeing that he paused, as if he expected an answer, the girl said coldly: ‘State your business briefly. From what I know, and have heard of you, I care not how soon our interview ends.’

‘If I were not traduced,’ said the lawyer, speaking gravely, and weighing every word before he uttered it, ‘I should be more fortunate than hundreds who are better than myself. I am fully aware that many foul slanders are in circulation respecting me; and I now feel them the more deeply, that they have reached your ears, and that you believe them.’

Miss Crawford made no reply; although he evidently paused for that purpose.

‘May I not at least be allowed the opportunity of clearing my character, by learning what has been said against it?’ said he earnestly.

‘I make no charges, and wish to hear no justification,’ replied the girl firmly. ‘Let me know the nature of your business at once, or I shall retire without it.’

From this abrupt answer there was no appeal; and Bolton said, in the same calm manner which he had hitherto adopted: ‘Since you wish it, I’ll waive all further allusion to these idle tales, which a breath might scatter, and come at once to the object of my visit, which refers principally to yourself, as connected with your father’s Will.’

Miss Crawford became exceedingly pale, and her fingers convulsively grasped the top of a chair.

‘You need say no more,’ said she: ‘I understand all the rest. You would tell me that this house is yours; that I am an intruder on your bounty; that the possessions of which you have defrauded me are no longer mine; that my father’s house, in which I have lived from infancy, is no longer a home for me; that I must go from it, what you have made me—a beggar. You see, Mr. Bolton, the thoughts of some people are written in their faces, and can be read.’

Bolton bit his lip; and his cheek flushed slightly; but there was nothing else to indicate emotion on his part, as he said: ‘I am deeply grieved that you interpret my thoughts so harshly. When you hear the offer which I have come to make, whether it be agreeable or not, you will at least acquit me of selfishness; and if you accept it, it will settle this whole matter much to my satisfaction, and I shall be only too happy, if it is to yours.’

‘And the offer is—what?’ inquired she, without the slightest abatement of the coldness of her manner.

‘That you should share the fortune with me,’ replied Bolton.

‘I thought so. If I will give you a portion of my fortune, you will leave me the rest.’

Bolton bit his lip.

‘I am particularly unfortunate in not being understood,’ said he.

‘Was not such your meaning, Sir?’ said Miss Crawford, keeping her eye fastened on his, and watching every sign of equivocation or guilt; ‘your language was plain enough.’

Distrust and anger were written in every feature as she spoke. Bolton saw that she had prejudices which he had no time to overcome; and he felt that he was watched by one whose intellect was naturally keen, and whose faculties were sharpened by fear and suspicion. So he determined to appeal at once to her interests.

‘Such was *not* my meaning,’ said he, in a decided tone. ‘And it is time that we came to a full and clear understanding of it, without further waste of words. When I offered to give you a portion of your father’s property, it was by making you my wife. On these terms, and on these alone, the wealth which your father has made *mine* will become yours, and at your disposal.’

‘Now, at least, I understand you, Sir,’ said she, drawing herself up; while every feature of her beautiful face glowed with anger and contempt: ‘you would buy my silence; for the sake of my fortune, you would take the encumbrance of its lawful owner. You would be magnanimous, and make the beggar your wife! No, Sir!’ said she, speaking with an earnestness that astonished him; ‘not until every appeal that the law allows has been made, will I yield possession of a single thing. From court to court I will contest that Will as a forgery; and until expelled from hence, I will maintain

my hold. Should I fail, I would starve in the streets before my name should be changed for yours. Begone, Sir ! Until the law gives you this house, you have no business here.'"

'Resist if you will,' said the attorney, still retaining full command of his temper; 'but you will repent it. You will expose to the world the stain upon your family, which otherwise would be known to but few. You will tarnish the fame of her who gave you birth, and will cast a shade upon the memory of the gray-headed old man who has just gone to his grave.'

'T is false !' exclaimed the girl, now fairly aroused; 't is you who disgrace them, yourself, and human nature. I *will* make this matter public. The truth shall come out at last, and prove *them* unsullied; and brand *you* for the black-hearted man that the world now suspects you to be. You cannot frighten me from my purpose. If I fail, I shall only have done my duty; if I succeed, I will have justice measured out, of which you shall have a full share.'

'You speak confidently; but you don't know what law is,' said Bolton, coldly.

'I know what it is meant to be. It is intended to shield the weak from the strong; the injured from the oppressor; to right the wronged; to keep down injustice and crime. That's what it's *meant* for; but there are those who disgrace it as much as they disgrace the image of the great God which they bear.'

The attorney had remained calm until now; but now he fairly shook with passion, as he answered in a quick, stifled voice,

'It is *my* turn now. I have made a fair and honorable proposal to you. I have offered to share the fortune which your father gave me with one whom I know he loved; not from fear of what you or the law could do; not from love

of you, but from gratitude to him. I am frank, you see. You have scouted my offer; insulted me, and claimed the law of the land. That law you shall have, to your cost. Drag this matter from court to court, and from court to court I'll follow it; and when it is decided, what the law allows you you shall have; but not one tittle more; not the tenth part of a cent, if you were begging your bread; not one crust to keep the soul in your body! Now you understand me!

'It would be devilish strange if she did n't,' said a stern voice behind him. At the same time a heavy hand was placed on his shoulder. 'So the Devil has dropped his mask?' Bolton turned and found himself face to face with a young man of four or five-and-twenty, whose manner plainly showed that he had overheard at least a part of the conversation. Before the attorney had time to collect his thoughts, the other said:

'Are you going out of the house? or will you wait until you are thrust out like a dog?'

'By what right?' demanded the lawyer.

'No matter,' interrupted the stranger. '*You* are not the person to question that.'

Bolton measured him with his eye. He was slight, but tall and muscular, and might prove an unpleasant antagonist. The lawyer was no coward where his life was not immediately concerned; but there was nothing to be gained by a scuffle; and that was a thing which he never at any time lost sight of. So he said:

'I did not come here to raise a riot over the grave of my friend, or to break in upon the grief of his daughter by out-rages or violence.'

'Your last words to Miss Crawford were certainly expressive of very great consideration for the daughter,' said the

stranger, with a slight sneer. 'I have told you to quit this house; and now you *must*, without further parley.' As he spoke, he led him to the door, but using no violence. He opened it, and pointed to the entry.

The lawyer's face was perfectly livid, as he turned and fixed his eye on him; and shaking his thin finger, uttered the words:

'I'll remember you.'

'I do n't doubt it,' replied the young man; and he slammed the door in his face.

Bolton strode through the entry, banged the street-door after him, and sprang down the steps into the street.

Nearly the whole time that he had been in the house, his confederates, Higgs and Wilkins, had been loitering about it. No sooner was he come out than they joined him.

Mr. Higgs was considerably elated; possibly by the fineness of the night, although it is not unlikely that several visits which he had paid to a small tavern, three streets off, might have had something to do with the state of his spirits. Wilkins, on the other hand, was sullen and savage. When he joined the attorney he did not utter a syllable; but stalked silently at his side, noticing him no more than if he had been a mile off.

'Well, old boy,' said Mr. Higgs, speaking a little slowly, and somewhat thickly: 'when is it to be?'

'Never!' answered the attorney, abruptly.

Mr. Higgs stared at him in a manner which was decidedly impressive.

'I beg pardon, Mr. Bolton,' said he; 'but did you make use of the word *never*?'

'I did.'

'Speak out, man, will you?' said Wilkins, in a harsh

voice: 'what have you done? We must know some day, so tell us at once; what luck?'

'D — n her! none! This blasted Will must be proved. She rejected me; scouted me; all but cursed me. I bore it as long as I could, then I threatened; and, by —, she defied me; and vowed she would not quit the house till forced by law.'

'A young woman of mettle,' ejaculated Mr. Higgs.

The attorney did not notice him, but went on. 'She has a fellow leagued with her; a young slip as fierce and proud as herself. He looked as if he only wanted an excuse to take me by the throat.'

'Did you place your hand emphatically on your heart, so?' asked Mr. Higgs, steadying himself in front of the excited lawyer, and, after several attempts, laying his hand on the spot designated, 'and try to come the insinuating over her? It's wonderful how they swallow that — them women.'

'Then there's trouble in the wind,' said Wilkins, bluntly.

'She'll fight to the last. There's this boy, too; a lover, I suppose. Let him look to himself! He has crossed me; and few do that without repenting it.'

'That's true!' muttered Wilkins; 'but,' continued he, in so low a tone that the lawyer could not understand him, 'there's a day of reckoning, when our score will be settled.'

He said nothing more, but dropped behind his companions, for he had observed a dark figure following them, keeping in the obscure parts of the street, but always having them in full view. He stopped to watch it until his companions were at some distance, when the person suddenly darted forward. It was a female, with her face so closely muffled that he could not see it; but a hand touched his arm, and a voice that thrilled through his heart said:

‘George, can I speak one word with you?’

Wilkins gasped for breath, and staggered against a wall, as powerless as a child. He could not speak.

‘George, dear George, for God’s sake let me have a few words with you!’ said the same low, supplicating voice. She took his hand, which shook violently, in both of hers. ‘You *will*, George, will you not?’

‘Halloa! what are you about? Come on, will you? We’re waiting for you,’ shouted Higgs.

‘Do n’t go! do n’t go, George!’ exclaimed the girl, earnestly; ‘do hear me—*do*, before it’s too late!’

The man hesitated; but at that moment both Higgs and Bolton turned back and began to approach him. He drew himself up, unclasped the fingers which were twined round his own, and flung the hand from him:

‘Begone!’ exclaimed he.

‘No, George, I will not. Hear me but this once; give me but five minutes, and I will never trouble you again.’

Wilkins bent his mouth to her ear, and said in a hoarse whisper:

‘You know how we parted last. If you follow me, we’ll part so again.’

The girl shrank from him, and her husband strode off without once looking back.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON the following morning an elderly man was seen walking briskly toward the lower part of the city. He was a hale, hearty old fellow, not too fat nor thin ; with a merry, joyous eye, and a good-natured, cheery face that had a smile in every wrinkle. He was dressed in a plain suit of black, and under his arm he carried a cane, which he sometimes transferred to his hand, for the purpose of using it in walking. He must have been past sixty, for his hair was silvery white ; yet his cheek was rosy, and his step firm and elastic, like one who, in spite of time and trouble, kept a young heart in his bosom ; and as he walked briskly along, looking now at the blue sky, now at the houses, now at the throng which toiled through the street, now pausing at a shop-window to examine some trifle that caught his fancy, or nodding with a frank, good-humored smile to a passing acquaintance, there was so much buoyancy and sunshine in him that it made one young to look at him. It was just the day too to meet such a man ; a soft, warm morning in the midst of winter. Ice and snow had disappeared, and the genial hours of spring seemed stealing back at a time when all nature was bleak and desolate.

The old gentleman had a companion, who, as he walked gaily along, pausing or increasing his pace as suited his humor, adapted his gait to his ; stopping when he stopped, and listening quietly, yet with deep interest, to the remarks which dropped from him. This person was a young man of three or four-and-twenty ; tall, thin, with a quick, bright eye

black hair, and pale complexion. There was a strong contrast between him and the old man. There was more of earnestness, perhaps of sadness in his expression, and he bore the look of one who had buffeted his way through the world, and even in the outset of life had become a stern and determined man. His face, however, was prepossessing; for frankness was stamped on every feature; and when he laughed, which he frequently did, as they went along, there was something gushing, heart-felt, and child-like in its tone, which showed that trouble and not nature had wrinkled his brow and saddened his spirit.

They were conversing on matters which interested both of them deeply, although that interest displayed itself differently in each.

‘Keep cool, my boy, keep cool!’ said the old man, looking merrily out of his blue eye, and placing his cane under his arm, and his hands under his coat-tails; ‘keep cool; we’ll match him yet; but we must fight him with his own weapons. Above all things, do n’t get excited.’

‘I am not in the least excited,’ replied the other gravely. ‘Indeed, Doctor, I think that you are the most so of the two,’ said he, smiling. Then, after a pause, he asked: ‘Do you think her father ever made that Will? It seems scarcely possible.’

‘I do n’t intend to think about it,’ replied the old man. ‘It’s strange; but strange things happen every day. It is strange — very strange. If it was n’t for the sin of swearing, I should say it was d —— d strange, if that’s any comfort to you.’

‘Well,’ said his companion, laughing, ‘if you won’t commit yourself on that point, of course you will not undertake to think whether the law will sustain such a Will or not?’

‘Of course I won’t; for that’s just what we are going to

a lawyer to inquire about,' replied Doctor Thurston. 'After we've seen him, I'll think boldly, and not till then. Here's the place.' As he spoke, he pointed to a brick building, two stories in height, be-labelled from top to bottom with small tin signs, indicating in gilt letters that the crop of attorneys was numerous and flourishing. Among these was one sign, discolored and gray, and almost illegible from age. On it were simply the words 'D. FISK.'

'That's the man,' said the Doctor, pointing to the sign. 'He'll ferret his way to the very bottom of this matter, depend on it. I know him well.'

Having thus expressed his faith in the abilities of the professional gentleman whose territories he was preparing to invade, he opened a small glass door at the bottom of a narrow stair-way, which they ascended, and found themselves in Mr. Fisk's outer office.

Law certainly engenders dust and decay; for every thing was covered with the first, and seemed in a very advanced stage of the last. There were three tables in the office; broken, and covered with ragged baize; six or seven chairs, some lame of a leg, and one or two deficient in an arm, or weak in the back. Loose papers were lying on the tables, and empty ink-bottles and old hearth-brushes under them, half buried in dust, cobwebs, and shreds of paper, apparently the accumulated sweepings of years; and indicating, either that Mr. Fisk was too much immersed in the duties of his profession to care about the cleanliness of his office, or that dust, cobwebs, empty bottles, and broken chairs and tables, were essential to the proper management of an extensive law practice.

At one of the windows a young gentleman, belonging to the class of individuals usually denominated 'students at law,' was intently occupied in blowing his breath on the

panes, and cutting the initials of his name thereon with his fore-finger. Another young man, with light hair and spectacles, clad in a coat sufficiently exploded under the arms and ragged at the elbows to belong to that class of habiliments technically called 'office-coats,' was nodding over a lucid work on law practice; while behind him at the fire a third student, a promising young gentleman, attired in a black coat, out at the elbows and deficient in buttons, was engaged in the rather matter-of-fact employment of roasting chestnuts on a broken shovel, carefully keeping the nuts in their place with the feather-end of a quill.

In front of the fire, with his back to it, his hands in his breeches-pockets, a pen in his mouth, and one behind his ear, indicating that it required the active exercise of several pens at the same time to keep up the business of the office, stood Mr. Cutbill, a gentleman with thin whiskers and a Roman nose. He was the head-clerk; worked hard, talked equally hard when he got an opportunity, and stood in wholesome awe of Mr. Fisk, on whose movements in the next room he kept a wary eye.

'Ah! Doctor!' exclaimed he, advancing and offering his hand as soon as he saw who they were; 'glad to see you; *very* glad to see you. In law again? It does one good to get a Doctor in a lawyer's hands; indeed it does. You bleed us, and we bleed you! Ha! ha! But I suppose you'll pay off the score when you get us on our backs;' and Mr. Cutbill rubbed his hands together joyously.

Dr. Thurston laughed, and said that he might trust him for that.

'No doubt, no doubt. Sit down, Sir; sit down,' said he, bowing and smirking.

'Can I see Mr. Fisk?' inquired Doctor Thurston, without taking a seat.

‘He’s engaged just now,’ replied the clerk; ‘quite busy.’
‘Will he be so long?’

Mr. Cutbill glanced his eye into the next room, pursed up his mouth, looking at the ceiling with his left eye, as if he were going through some abstruse mathematical calculation, by which he would be enabled to give the precise time in minutes and seconds; after which he said he thought *not*, and drew the skirts of his coat open behind.

‘Take a chair,’ said he, pointing to an article of that description with no bottom to it. ‘Oh! ah! I beg pardon; do n’t take *that*; we keep that for the long-winded fellows who tell the same story over every time they come here. It’s uncomfortable, and they do n’t sit long.’

Here Mr. Cutbill laughed in a subdued manner, and said: ‘We won’t give *you* that chair, Sir;’ and he pushed two others toward them.

‘Fisk has his hands full, eh?’ inquired the Doctor, as he and his friend seated themselves.

‘Run down, Sir, absolutely run down,’ replied Mr. Cutbill, straightening himself up, and throwing out his chest by way of exercise. ‘Clients, clients, from morning till night. In a confidential way, Sir: he has the best run of clients in the city; all first-raters. I think,’ continued he, relapsing into a deep calculation, ‘that I may say Mr. Fisk has not a single bad client; none of those who sneak into an office as if they had no business there; none of those who open the door on a crack, and peep in, while they ask advice; none of those who *knock*: now take my advice,’ said he, growing animated; ‘never open a door to a knock. We never do it — do we, Torker?’

‘Devil a bit; catch *us* at it!’ replied the person thus addressed. After which he breathed violently on the window-pane, and with the fore-finger of his right hand cut a capital T with eminent success.

'If you do,' continued Mr. Cutbill, 'ten to one, you'll stumble on a dun, or a perambulating female, on a predatory excursion for some unheard-of charitable society, or a small gentleman in a white cravat, seeking to found a church on the top of an iceberg, where he is to preach to the Esquimaux on the sin of luxury and high living. Confound it! Mr. Juniper,' exclaimed he, breaking off an enumeration which promised to be a long one, and addressing the young gentleman engaged at the fire: 'you'll have Fisk on us if you do n't keep those chestnuts quiet.' This abrupt remark was elicited by a succession of sudden reports emanating from the culinary department, like a volley of small artillery.

'Can't help it,' replied Mr. Juniper, composedly continuing his occupation; 'a man must eat when he's hungry, and chestnuts will bu'st when they're roasted. I wanted a knife to nib their noses, but I had n't one; so I'm blow'd if they may n't bu'st, just as much as they please. You're always grumbling; but bloody ready to eat 'em.'

Mr. Cutbill turned very red, and assumed an air of extreme dignity, for the purpose of counteracting any derogatory effect which this remark might have on the clients. At the same time he told Mr. Juniper that he had always, up to that time, supposed him to be a gentleman. In reply to which, Mr. Juniper informed him that he had thought correctly, but as for him, that he was a 'poor squirt,' and if he again let his coat-tail fall in the shovel, as he was doing at that particular moment, he would set it on fire.

Further conversation of the same pleasant character was interrupted by a stir in the inner office.

'By Jove! there he is!' exclaimed Mr. Cutbill. 'Go in, Doctor, and you, Sir,' said he, bowing to his companion. 'Quick! — do n't wait for him to come here, or there'll be

the deuce to pay. That Juniper,' he added, sinking his voice, 'do n't care a straw how much of a row he kicks up, because I'm head-clerk, and take all the blame. Mum!' said he, placing his finger significantly on his lips, and favoring the Doctor with an infinite series of sudden, sharp winks. At the same time he seized a law-book, and plunged over head and ears in an intense perusal of its contents. The door of the inner room opened, and a voice said, 'Good-morning.' Then a man passed out, nodding slightly to Mr. Cutbill, who bowed deferentially.

Without waiting for any further suggestion, the Doctor and his companion ushered themselves into the presence of Mr. Fisk.

He was a small man, thin and wrinkled, with a large, prominent, and bright eye, and a small, tightly-closed mouth. His hair was matted and twisted in every direction, from a habit of running his fingers through it when in deep thought; but other than this, there was nothing peculiar about him, except an immoderately large shirt-collar, which stuck up under his ears, apparently supporting his head on his shoulders. The table in front of him was covered with bundles of papers tied with red tape, either waiting their turn to be perused, or laid aside after having been read; and a great many loose ones were strewed about. All the chairs in his immediate vicinity were covered with open law-books, with their faces down, and some were even lying on the floor. Before him was a paper on which he had been writing. When they entered, being deeply engaged in investigating the various means by which an insurance company might receive a premium of insurance, and in case of fire not pay its policy, he did not look up until Dr. Thurston spoke.

'Ah! Doctor! I'm glad to see you. Sit down,' said he, pointing to a chair.

‘This is Mr. Francis Wharton, of whom I spoke to you,’ said the other, by way of introducing his companion.

The lawyer bowed to the person thus presented to his notice, and shaking hands with him, again requested them to be seated. At the same time he took a chair opposite them, and, without speaking, looked at them as if to know the object of their visit.

‘I came here on the same business about which Doctor Thurston has already spoken to you,’ said Wharton, in reply to the look, which seemed more particularly directed to him.

Mr. Fisk merely bowed.

‘I am not aware whether the particulars were fully detailed then.’

‘It would be well to mention them again,’ said Mr. Fisk, quietly. As he said this, he pursed his mouth up into a point, and folding his hands on the top of his head, leaned back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the wall. He did not speak nor move until Wharton had narrated the whole history of the claim set up by Bolton, and of his two interviews with Miss Crawford. He mentioned that until that Will was produced, nothing had ever transpired to make them suppose that she was other than what her father had always represented her to be, his legitimate child. When he had got through, Mr. Fisk sat up in his chair.

‘And you intend to resist the probate of that Will?’ said Mr. Fisk, quietly.

‘Of course we do!’ exclaimed the Doctor, thumping his cane vehemently on the floor. ‘D—n it, Sir, if no else will, I’ll do it.’

‘On what ground?’ inquired Mr. Fisk, nibbling a pen, while a good deal of fun gleamed out of the corner of his eye.

‘What ground, Sir?’ exclaimed the Doctor, growing more

and more excited; 'what ground, Sir? It strikes me that the ground is palpable enough. On the ground that it's a forgery, Sir!' and the Doctor thumped his cane on the floor, and planted himself in front of Mr. Fisk, as if he had settled the whole matter at once.

Mr. Fisk's eye gleamed again, and he gave a slight, unsatisfactory cough as he asked: 'What proof have you?'

'Proof, Sir, proof, Sir!' again exclaimed the Doctor, raising his cane, and again thumping it very hard against the floor. 'I say, Sir, d—n proof! I repeat it, Sir, d—n proof! It's the greatest stumbling-block that an honest man ever had in the way of his rights. Besides that,' exclaimed he, as a bright idea flashed across his mind, 'the Will itself proves it. On the face of it is a foul, glaring lie. Does n't it call this girl—my own dear, darling little Helen—a—a—illegitimate. Think of *that*, Sir.'

Had Mr. Fisk wished to drive his client out of his senses, he could not have adopted a more effectual mode than the simple reply which he made, 'Perhaps she is.'

Doctor Thurston paced up and down the room for nearly a minute before he could speak, and then he exclaimed:

'My God! Helen Crawford illegitimate! Have n't I known her since she was no higher than my knee?—very shortly before her mother's death? Did n't her mother on her death-bed call me to her, and put that little child in my arms and bless it, and beg me to love and watch over it as if it were my own?—and have n't I done so? Crusty and crabbed an old fellow as I am, has n't there always been a warm spot in my heart for her? God bless her! and do n't I love that dear little girl more than all the world beside? Would n't I protect her with my heart's blood? I'd like to see the man who'd wrong her while this old arm can strike a blow!' and he clutched his cane, and shook it fiercely, as

if at that moment he would have derived intense satisfaction from breaking the head of somebody. 'I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Fisk,' said he, striding up to the table, and striking his hand vehemently on a pile of law-papers, and thereby raising a cloud of dust; 'if she's illegitimate, so am I;' and he again struck his fist down, as if he had driven a nail home and was clenching it.

'Did you see her mother married?' inquired Mr. Fisk; 'did you ever know any one who did? — or did you ever see her marriage-certificate?'

'No.'

'Did you ever see the clergyman who performed the ceremony?'

'How could I? He died very shortly after it; before I knew the family.'

'Did you know his name? — and did you ever see the church-record containing the memorandum of their marriage?'

'No.'

'Do you know where it took place?'

'No.'

'Then you know nothing about it,' replied Mr. Fisk, 'nor whether it is true or not. Her father, in his Will, says that she is a natural child; and he certainly ought to know something about it.'

'What's to be done then?' demanded the Doctor, impatiently.

'I'll tell you,' said Mr. Fisk, dropping his cold manner, and entering with some warmth into the feelings of his client. 'Between ourselves, I believe, as you do, that the Will is a forgery: First, because I know something of Mr. Crawford and his family, and believe him to have been a man pure in thought and deed; and next, because this Bolton is no

stranger to me, and I know him to be the reverse of Mr. Crawford in all respects. I tell you this not to excite your hopes, but to arouse your industry; for suspicion is not proof; and unless you can bring something more than this, that Will will be proved, and that young girl will be stripped of all that she has. You must ascertain whether Mr. Crawford was really married to his daughter's mother; also when and where; the name of the clergyman, and of those present at the ceremony; and whether any of them are still living; and if a marriage certificate was made out, who saw it, and what has become of it. Any thing that will tend to substantiate Miss Crawford's legitimacy will be useful of course only to cast suspicion on the Will. You might also learn whether Mr. Crawford at any time made a previous Will, and how he disposed of his property in it; and how he there mentions his daughter. You will doubtless collect much that will be totally useless and inadmissible as evidence; but find out every thing you can, and I will sift it afterwards. When you are able to give me more definite information, I shall be able to advise you more effectually. Your opponent is a vigilant fellow, and one who manages his cards adroitly; and I will frankly tell you that I fear you will find the proof of these matters not so clear as you imagine. You may be sure that Bolton examined this thing well, and knew the strength of your testimony to a hair, before he committed himself so boldly as he has done. He is shrewd, sagacious, unprincipled, and would stick at nothing to accomplish his ends.'

'Depend on it, he never offered to marry Miss Crawford without some ulterior object. He was afraid of her. I'd stake my life on it!' exclaimed the Doctor, earnestly.

'It looks suspicious indeed,' replied the lawyer, drumming with his fingers on the table. 'Who did you say were the witnesses?'

‘Two fellows I never heard of. I forget their names.’

‘Bolton has not yet applied for letters testamentary, I suppose?’ said the lawyer.

‘I do n’t know,’ replied Doctor Thurston, ‘but I think not. He told Miss Crawford that he intended to. She has not heard from him since.’

‘She being illegitimate, it would not be necessary to serve a citation on her.’

Mr. Fisk kept drumming on the table for some time, and then said, at the same time rising, to give them a hint that they had occupied enough of his time, ‘I’ll attend to it; and you must n’t fail to tell me whatever you learn. At all events, we will attend at the proving of the Will, and will sift the testimony of their witnesses thoroughly. Good-morning.’

He bowed as he spoke, and neither the Doctor nor his companion having any more to communicate, took their leave.

CHAPTER XIX.

‘Now then to my work!’ muttered the attorney, a few days after his interview with Miss Crawford; ‘there’s no thing left but law, and every thing depends on skill and management.’

Now that he had abandoned all hope of an amicable compromise, and was determined to advance, and support his claim at all hazards, and to abide the event, whatever it might be, he was a different man; cold, calm, and calculating. He measured every difficulty with deliberate forethought, fortified every weak part of his cause, and shutting his eyes to those things which might happen to blast him, but which he could not prevent, he waited patiently for the result. He lost no time in presenting the Will for probate; and to avoid all appearance of apprehension, he caused a citation to be served on Miss Crawford, apprising her of the time when the Will would be proved, and summoning her to attend. These steps taken, nothing more could be done for fifteen days, as the law required the lapse of that space of time between the serving of the citation and the proving of the Will; and fifteen days of intense anxiety they were to Bolton.

In the meanwhile, neither the friends nor the counsel of Miss Crawford had been idle, although they kept their proceedings profoundly quiet. On questioning her, they learned that her father had frequently spoken of his marriage with her mother, who was poor and an orphan at the time, and that by reason of opposition on the part of his parents, the

ceremony had been performed in secret, and with none present except the clergyman and two witnesses. She had never heard the names either of the clergyman or of those who were present at the ceremony, nor had she seen her mother's marriage-certificate. She knew that she had once possessed one, but she believed it to be lost. In the course of their investigations, however, they stumbled upon a Will made by Mr. Crawford several years previous to his death, in which he mentioned Helen Crawford as his only child by his wife Catherine, and left to her all his property. On this 'instrument,' however, there was a memorandum stating that it had been revoked by a Will of a later date, which they were unable to find.

These facts having been communicated to Mr. Fisk, fully awakened his suspicions, and he knuckled down to his work in good earnest. He set on foot inquiries respecting the character of Wilkins and Higgs, by which he discovered that they were men of the worst possible reputation; familiar with crime, and the intimates of those who followed it as a regular means of livelihood; and as he proceeded in his investigations, many other little matters leaked out respecting those two gentlemen, which, in all probability, they would have preferred should have been known only to themselves. By his ingenuity also, a friendly communication was opened with persons frequenting the same haunts with the two confederates, and several of them were paid to keep an eye on their motions and conversation, and to report what they discovered to the watchful lawyer. Little, however, was gained in this way; for Wilkins was too sullen and moody, and Higgs too much on his guard, to let any thing escape that might implicate them. They, however, were several times traced to the lawyer's office, and had once or twice been observed in earnest and excited conversation with him in the street.

The visits of Wilkins to the widow had likewise been observed, and as they were frequent, Mr. Fisk naturally supposed that his intimacy in that quarter must be great ; and with no other object than that of leaving nothing untried, he determined to spring a mine in that direction. Matters were in this state, when, about nine o'clock one cold frosty morning, a stout man with a pimpled face, verging into purple toward the end of his nose, opened the door of a small tavern in the neighborhood of Centre-street, and stepped into the open air. He looked up and down the street, then at the sky ; stamped his thick cane shod with iron heavily on the pavement, and cleared his throat ; after which he deliberately placed his cane under his arm, and buttoned his coat to his chin. This done, he turned slowly round, and looked in the door.

‘Come along, you cuss, will yer ? P’raps you’re waiting for a persuader. If y’ are, ye’ll get it, blast yer !’ And he shook his heavy stick insinuatingly at the object of his remarks.

Thus encouraged, a large white bull-dog walked to the door, with a step as deliberate as that of his master, stared up and down the street, then at the sky, in the same manner as the gentleman who preceded him had done ; after which he seated himself on end, and looked pleasantly up in the face of Mr. Rawley, as if he had nothing to do with a volley of epithets which that gentleman was just then showering upon him, and as if he wished him not to hurry himself in the least.

Mr. Rawley having unbottled his anger, pulled the door of his house shut, put his stick under his arm, and thrusting his hands in his breeches-pockets, walked briskly down the street, followed by Bitters, who kept so close at his heels that it seemed a matter of some singularity that his nose escaped collision with them.

Mr. Rawley walked on for some distance, when suddenly he stopped and uncorked again : 'Come along, you cuss!—you in-fer-nal cuss! Must I be a bu'stin' my lungs all day, a callin' arter yer?'

These remarks were addressed to Bitters, who was again delinquent, and who had paused at the corner of a street to watch the progress of a fight which was going on between two small dogs, with the eye of a connoisseur who seemed desirous of dropping a hint or two to them on the subject.

'Come here, I say!' shouted Mr. Rawley, brandishing his cudgel.

Bitters approached in an oblique direction, which brought him a little nearer his master, and a great deal nearer the combatants, and paused, and, looking over his shoulder at his master, winked his eyes slowly, at the same time making a painful effort at swallowing, which showed that his feelings were deeply interested.

'Come here, will yer?' bawled out Mr. Rawley.

Bitters deliberated a moment, then pitched headlong into the fight, and shook both dogs violently, by which piece of exercise being apparently much relieved, he went to within twenty feet of his master, and placidly seated himself, waiting for him to go on.

'Have n't I brung you up in the best of 'ciety, yer brute yer? and is this the way you're going for to disgrace me, by stickin' yer ugly muzzle into every vulgar rumpus atwixt all low-lived mongrels you meet, and you a reg'lar thorough-bred bull? Do it ag'in, that's all; do it ag'in!'

And Mr. Rawley shook his stick ferociously at the dog, who kept at a respectful distance until his master had become somewhat mollified, after which he gradually narrowed the space between them, until he followed as before, with his nose almost touching his heel.

It was a fine cold morning. The air was quiet ; the sun shone cheerily, and every thing looked gay and bright. Even the old houses in that ruinous part of the city had a fresh appearance. Mr. Rawley walked sturdily on, thumping his cane on the stones until they rang, and clearing his throat manfully. He struck into Chatham-street, and along that thoroughfare he directed his course, jostling his way through the crowd, and making way for nobody. Through Chatham-street, along the Park, and down Broadway he pursued his way, and close at his heels followed Bitters, until they came near Wall-street, a few blocks above which Mr. Rawley turned off into Nassau-street. It was early in the day, and that narrow street was thronged with people, among whom he drifted on, until he came to the small two-story building, on the outside of which Mr. Fisk kept his sign, and in the inside of which he kept his office.

He ascended the outer steps, and pulled open the door at the foot of the inner staircase.

‘Go up !’ said he, holding open the door, and looking over his shoulder at the dog.

In obedience to his hint, and aided by the application of Mr. Rawley’s foot which accompanied it, Bitters preceded his master until he reached the top of the stairs, where he gave a short asthmatic cough, and seated himself.

‘Is this ’ere where Mr. Fisk keeps ?’ inquired Mr. Rawley, after he had attained the same eminence with the dog, and looking very hard at Mr. Cutbill, who was looking equally hard at Bitters.

‘This is his office,’ replied the head-clerk, continuing his earnest gaze at the dog.

Mr. Rawley, on receiving the answer, took off his hat and placed it on the floor, laid his stick beside it, pulled off his gloves and threw them in his hat, unbuttoned his coat and

shook it gently, after which he drew from his pocket a dirty spectacle-case, and an equally dirty pocket-book of a large size. Laying the last on his knee, he opened the first, and fixing a pair of iron spectacles on his nose, he proceeded to unstrap the pocket-book, from which he took a letter, smoothed it on his knee, and without saying a word, reached it to Mr. Cutbill. Having successfully accomplished this feat, with equal deliberation he replaced the pocket-book and spectacles, buttoned his breeches-pocket, pulled down his waistcoat, and stared Mr. Cutbill full in the face.

That gentleman read the letter through, and then said :

‘Oh, Sir, you’re Mr. Rawley?’

‘Yes, Sir, I am that individooal.’ And Mr. Rawley looked as if asking, ‘And now that you know it, what are you going to do about it?’

‘I’m delighted to see you ; and so will Mr. Fisk be,’ said Mr. Cutbill, advancing, and rubbing his hands. ‘We were quite anxious to see you, indeed we were. A fine dog that, Sir, a *very* fine dog!’

‘He *is* a fine dog,’ replied Mr. Rawley, with some emphasis ; ‘a remarkable fine one.’

‘Upon my soul, I think I never saw a finer. A pointer, I think?’

‘No, Sir ; a bull — a regular bull ; a real out-and-outer.’

‘Fine fellow ! — fine fellow ! Poor pup — pup — pup !’ said Mr. Cutbill, looking insinuatingly at Bitters, and patting his own knee as his proxy, by way of hinting to him that his intentions were friendly. ‘Is he vicious ? I hope he a’n’t.’

‘He wicious ! Let me catch him a-being wicious — that’s all ! He never killed no body. He used a young nigger rather rough last fall, and bit a hole in the bowels of a small Irish infant ; but it was all in play. He’s the best-naturedest dog in the world, if you let him alone.’

‘Oh! we won’t disturb him then,’ said Mr. Cutbill, increasing the distance between himself and the amiable animal; ‘we won’t notice him; but he’s a prodigiously fine dog. I think Mr. Fisk is at leisure to see you; and you had better go in and take him with you. I’m sure Mr. Fisk will admire him; he’s such a noble specimen — so like a lion. If he do n’t like my looking at him, I won’t. He looks as if he did n’t.’

‘It a’ n’t you that’s a ’citing him,’ replied Mr. Rawley; ‘it’s that chap there,’ said he, pointing to Mr. Juniper, who was saluting the dog with sundry pellets of chewed paper, ejected through a tube; while Bitters, laboring under the delusion that his nose was beset by divers flies, of a species hitherto unknown, kept snapping in every direction. ‘Let me tell you this, my chicken,’ continued Mr. Rawley: ‘that there dog’s name is Bitters; and he did n’t get that name for nothing, I tell yer. If you’ve cut your wisdom-grinders, you’ll let that animal alone; for when his dander’s fairly riz, he’s h — ll for assault and battery. A gentleman worried that same dog one fine day, and the next year that same gen’leman wore a wooden leg. I only mention the fact; that’s all.’

‘Mr. Juniper, for God’s sake, do n’t disturb the animal!’ exclaimed Mr. Cutbill, earnestly; ‘of all abominable things, cruelty to dumb beasts is the worst. Poor fellow! poor fellow! I hope he do n’t make mistakes when he’s excited, and bite the wrong person?’

‘Not often; but he does sometimes, ’specially when he’s aggravated about the nose.’

‘Indeed! ah! I think you had better step in the next room; Mr. Fisk will see you at once. He’s very anxious to. Walk in, Sir; *do* walk in. Take the dog with you; a splendid animal! — beautiful! — a perfect study!’ And Mr.

Cutbill fairly bowed Mr. Rawley and his companion into the back office, and shut the door.

Mr. Rawley remained for some time shut up with Mr. Fisk, and when he came out, both he and Bitters wore an air of profound mystery. He looked at Mr. Cutbill, and then strode down the steps without saying a word. Bitters had already descended two steps, in pursuance of his example, when he detected Mr. Juniper in the act of throwing the cover of a book at his head; and turning short round, was ascending for the purpose of taking a gentlemanly notice of the aggression, when he was arrested by the voice of Mr. Rawley. He paused on the top step, looked Mr. Juniper full in the face, raised his upper lip, and favored him with a sarcastic smile which displayed all his teeth, and then quietly descended the steps, and made his egress from the door, being somewhat aided therein, as in his ascent, by a kick from his master. Mr. Rawley had scarcely emerged from the office into the street, when he stopped short, called his dog to his heel, deliberately reascended to Mr. Fisk's room, took a chair, drew it directly opposite to Mr. Fisk, sat down, and planting his hands on his knees, said :

‘Suppose a feller comes to my place, and drinks brandy-and-water all the evening — sum total, fifty cents — and don't pay: what then?’

Mr. Fisk looked at him for a moment, as if to find out what he meant, and then quietly replied :

‘Do n't give him any more.’

‘That won't pay for wot he 's swallowed already,’ very justly remarked Mr. Rawley.

‘No, but it will prevent his getting more deeply in your debt,’ was the answer.

Mr. Rawley pondered over this for a moment, and then suggested, in a somewhat insinuating tone :

‘Could n’t I just take it out of his hide?’

Mr. Fisk shook his head.

‘Do you mean to say, said Mr. Rawley, becoming emphatic, ‘that if an individooal comes to my tavern, drinks my liquor, and on being most respectfully invited to pay for that same, refuses, that I can’t lick him?’

‘I do,’ replied Mr. Fisk.

Mr. Rawley drew in his breath hard, and set his teeth. ‘D—n me if I believe that’s law!’ muttered he; ‘and cuss me if I do n’t try.’

He rose abruptly, and stalked out the office as unceremoniously as he had entered, Bitters following with his nose within six inches of his heel.

That gentleman now directed his course to the upper part of the city. He did not stop at his own tavern, but dodged in and out of various places in obscure parts of the town. He had undertoned gossipings in corners with several suspicious fellows, apparently obtaining but little satisfaction to his inquiries. He then went to Wilkins’s house, and had a long conversation with the red-headed lodger on the second floor, who treated him with singular deference. Thence he directed his steps to a small house in the Bowery; and very shortly after might have been seen, holding by the button no less a person than Aaron, the drab-colored body-guard of Mrs. Dow. Their colloquy must have been most satisfactory, for he chuckled and laughed to himself as he left him, and snapped his fingers, and swore lustily at the dog, which last demonstration of pleasure he did not intermit until he reached his own house.

What the nature of the conversation was, which had thus elated him, has not transpired; but during the whole of the evening succeeding it, Aaron was observed to wear an air of profound and uneasy gravity. He shook his head portent-

ously, and threw out so many cloudy hints that a certain gentleman who should be nameless, but whom they all knew, and particularly Mrs. Dow, and who came in and out of a certain house as if it were his own, and spoke to a certain respectable man-servant as if he were a dog, would 'get his bitters soon,' that the red-haired cook with prominent teeth, to use her own expression, 'was ready to bu'st with curiosity.'

A dozen times in the course of the evening Aaron thrust his head in the little parlor, (where Mrs. Dow was dozing over a large Bible and a small Prayer-book, with a stove under her feet,) to see what the hour was. Eight o'clock came, then nine; a quarter after, then half after, and at last ten. As the clock struck, Mrs. Dow lighted an under-sized lamp, with a particularly large extinguisher attached to it by a brass chain, and examined all the windows, doors, and latches, to see that they were properly secured. Having satisfied herself in this particular, and having thrust a long, sharp-pointed stick, with spasmodic violence, under every chair, sofa and side-board, and into every dark closet in the lower part of the house, and having closely scrutinized every drawer of sufficient magnitude to contain any thing larger than a rat, she felt morally certain that there were no hidden interlopers in the house; and accordingly took herself off to bed, first giving Aaron a particular caution not to set the house on fire in any accidental manner whatever.

No sooner did Aaron hear the door of her room double-locked, and the bolt drawn, than he clapped on his broad-brimmed hat and sallied out; and being somewhat flurried at the stealthy nature of this proceeding, he ran with all his might two blocks, in a direction contrary to that which he intended to take before he recovered his presence of mind. He then buttoned his coat up to his chin, fixed his hat firmly on his head, and changed his course.

The crowd had begun to thin off from the more public streets, and the narrow ones were comparatively quiet and deserted. It was a long time since Aaron had ventured out at such an unseemly hour, and his courage being of the passive rather than the active kind, he began to feel far from comfortable at the loneliness about him. He kept a wary eye on all the shadowy parts of the street, and gave a wide berth to every alley, which he felt certain was a lurking-place for tall, black-bearded ruffians, armed with ropes, ready to sally out and strangle him on the spot, pack him up in an empty pork-barrel, and sell him to some eminent physician, who would ask no questions, but would quietly boil him down, and make a skeleton of him before that time to-morrow night. At length he came to a street more dimly lighted than the others, and at the corner of this he stopped. It was so dark that he could not see a hundred yards; but within that space there was no one stirring.

'Here's a go!' muttered he, looking suspiciously about; 'a wery lonesome street! How a man might be invited to die here, wiolent! It smells of murder and arson, and sich. No matter,' said he, clearing his throat loudly, and straightening himself up: 'I'm under diwine pertection here as well as in my bed; though it *does* strike me that diwine pertection in my bed is a securer kind of pertection than diwine pertection just in this neighborhood.'

He continued standing for some time, as if in expectation of the arrival of some person; but the only one who did make his appearance being a man of a very cut-throat expression, who loitered slowly past him, his resolution was fast evaporating.

'If he is n't here in five minutes,' he muttered, 'I'm off.'

To employ his thoughts during that interval, he devoutly struck into a hymn, which, considering the circumstances, he

was delivering with great fervor, when a gruff voice exclaimed in his ear :

‘What yer raisin’ such a row about? If there *is* a land of pure delight, where saints infernal dwell, as you ’re tellin’ all this ’ere neighborhood, *this* a’ n’t it.’

‘Is it you, Mr. Rawley?’ inquired Aaron, in a subdued tone.

‘To be sure it is ; and you—you ’re the rummest man of your years I ever *did* see. Here’s this ’ere animal,’ said he, pointing to his dog, ‘has been a wantin’ to walk into your mutton ever since we turned the corner. He hates melancholy tunes, and supposed you wanted to pick a quarrel with him.’

‘It is a lonely spot, and a savage,’ replied Aaron gravely.

‘Pshaw ! come along ! There a’ n’t much danger when you ’ve got *him* with you ;’ and Mr. Rawley nodded his head toward Bitters.

Without further remark, he turned on his heel, and walked rapidly on, (followed by his dog and Aaron,) until he had crossed Broadway, and found himself in front of a large house in the neighborhood of Hudson-Square. Here he stopped.

‘You wait here till I call you,’ said he. He ascended the steps, rang the door-bell, and in a few moments was ushered into a richly-furnished room. At a table sat Mr. Fisk engaged in writing. A number of papers were unfolded in front of him ; and one or two law-books were lying open, as if he had just been referring to them.

He looked up as Mr. Rawley entered, but did not speak or rise.

Mr. Rawley deliberately walked to the table, laid his cane on it, and wiping his forehead with a cotton handkerchief which he drew from his hat, said :

‘I’ve brung the indiwidooal.’

‘Who?’ demanded Mr. Fisk.

‘Him — the widder’s man — the one we was arter.’

‘Where is he?’

‘In the street. You need n’t call him till you want him.’

‘I want him now; besides, he might get tired and go off.’

There was something so ludicrous in the idea of Aaron’s going off, that Mr. Rawley shut his eyes, and, compressing his lips, indulged in a violent fit of internal laughter, which threatened to shake him to pieces, and caused his stomach to quiver and undulate like a large jelly.

When he had partly recovered, he said:

‘Bless your soul! *He go! He can’t!* When I came in, I tipped Bitters a wink; that was enough. *Let* him go off arter that, that’s all. If he does, he’ll leave a pound of man’s flesh in the keeping of that there waluable animal.’ And here Mr. Rawley was attacked by another violent fit of merriment. ‘There a’n’t a constable,’ he continued, ‘nor deputy-sheriff like him for hanging on. A bone won’t buy him off. He settles all the quarrels atwixt me and my customers, and seems to take a pride in it.’

Mr. Fisk then told him that as it was growing late, it would be better to introduce Aaron at once. Whereupon Mr. Rawley left the room, and in a few minutes returned, followed by the man-servant and the dog. The latter walked stiffly across the room, and seated himself on the rug directly in front of the fire, while Aaron paused at the door. Mr. Fisk told him to come in, and to take a chair, which he did; and having perched himself in a very uncomfortable position on the extreme edge of it, attempted to look about him with an air of total unconcern, in which he signally failed. Mr. Rawley in the mean time betook himself to a large arm-chair, planted the end of his cane firmly on the floor, and clasping

both hands over the head of it, rested his chin on them, and rolled his eyes from Aaron to the lawyer with a look of keen and cunning interest.

Mr. Fisk, after a few casual remarks, during which Aaron so far recovered his composure as to settle himself in the chair, asked him if he were acquainted with one George Wilkins.

‘Of course I am,’ replied Aaron, confidently; ‘haven’t I let him in at the widder’s twice a week reg’lar, except the two months he was away at the South?’

Mr. Fisk made a memorandum on a piece of paper. ‘Now, Aaron,’ said he, ‘I want you to answer all my questions as accurately as if you were under oath. You know my object, I suppose?’

‘This gen’leman,’ said Aaron, pointing to Mr. Rawley, ‘says you’re to prevent Wilkins from marrying the widder. I want the same thing too.’

Mr. Fisk looked at Mr. Rawley, who was going through a series of extraordinary contortions of countenance, by way of giving him a hint to confirm the story which he had fabricated, for the purpose of enlisting Aaron in their interest. Then, without paying the slightest attention to the extraordinary performance, he said :

‘Such was *not* our purpose ; although, if we succeed, Wilkins will have something else to do than to persecute your mistress with his attentions ; and may find his motions somewhat less at his own command than they have hitherto been.’

Aaron looked earnestly at him, and uttered with an interrogatory jerk of the head the single word ‘Penitentiary?’

Mr. Fisk nodded.

‘Go on, Sir — go on!’ exclaimed the other, rubbing his

hands gently together, and giving several other peculiar indications of intense satisfaction. 'I'm ready.'

'Well, then,' said the lawyer, 'to save time, confine your answers strictly to the questions which I shall ask. You mentioned that you knew this Wilkins?'

'I do,' replied Aaron laconically.

'What kind of a man is he?'

'Tall man, black hair and whiskers; owdacious and rascally; bad cut to his eye.'

'Wounded in the eye?' inquired Mr. Fisk.

Aaron stared at him as if he did not understand.

'You said that he was cut in the eye,' repeated the lawyer.

I did n't,' replied Aaron, energetically. 'I said the cut of his eye was bad.'

Here Mr. Rawley laughed so prodigiously, that he was attacked with a violent fit of coughing; whereupon Bitters rose, and walked leisurely around the table, to see if any thing was required in his line. Finding that there was not, he returned to the rug, where he remained during the rest of the evening, winking and blinking, with his nose so close to the fire that he could not keep his eyes open.

When Mr. Rawley became somewhat composed, Mr. Fisk went on with his inquiries.

'When did Wilkins go to the South?'

'In the end of July last.'

'Ah! that's important. You're sure of that?' said the lawyer, with some animation.

'I'll swear to it,' replied Aaron, resolutely.

'When did he come back?'

'In the middle of September. I can tell the very day when I get home. I made a note of it.'

Mr. Fisk rubbed his hands with an appearance of still greater animation.

‘Are you sure that he did not return before that?’

‘I am,’ replied Aaron; ‘but he wrote reg’lar. His letters was n’t post-paid, nuther.’

‘How do you know he wrote them?’

Aaron, acting upon the well-known principle of law that no one is obliged to criminate himself, remained silent. Mr. Fisk saw the dilemma, and inquired what they contained.

‘Love, of the sweetest mixtur’.

‘Could you get one of them?’

‘It can’t be did,’ replied the other, with the decided manner of one who felt confident of what he asserted; ‘it’s totally onpossible. They’re under lock and key, in the red box with her patent mineral teeth, and she keeps the key herself. Them letters was of the urgentest kind,’ said he, with increasing animation; ‘they was alarming in their natur’; and what’s to be did, must be did soon; for it’s not onpossible that the widder might elope with him if it’s put off. She’s getting dreadful desp’rate.’

‘No fear of that!’ replied Mr. Fisk. ‘If *she* is ready, Wilkins is not. He’s married already, and will not risk taking a second wife until he gets rid of the first.’

The man-servant rose erect, his hair bristling nearly as straight as himself, as he exclaimed:

‘Married! Got a wife!’

The lawyer nodded.

Aaron gave a rapid flourish of the right leg, intended for a caper, snapped his fingers, uttered a loud laugh which terminated in a whistle, and then, suddenly recollecting where he was, cut himself short, and looked earnestly at the opposite wall, as if he had just made some important discovery in that quarter.

Mr. Fisk waited until this effervescence had subsided, and then said: ‘I wish you to remember that this conversation

is strictly confidential ; and that whatever you may learn from either Mr. Rawley or myself respecting Wilkins or his associates is not to be communicated to any one, and least of all to Mrs. Dow. It is not our intention that he shall escape us, or be enabled to carry out his designs against your mistress or any other person ; but in order to insure success, we must be secret ; for if our plans are discovered before they are ripe, they will be frustrated.'

Aaron having promised the required secrecy, a long conversation followed between him and the lawyer, in which the latter learned much respecting the habits and character of Wilkins ; though but little as to that of his companion Higgs, of whom Aaron had never even heard. Enough, however, had been elicited to satisfy Mr. Fisk that he had obtained a clue which would enable Miss Crawford to contend successfully against the Will, and to throw upon it a suspicion of forgery which he imagined it impossible that they could remove.

After making several notes and memoranda, he threw down his pen with the air of a man satisfied with his work, and told Aaron that he considered his information of much importance, and appointed a time at which to see him again. He then thanked him for the trouble which he had taken ; and said that he would not detain him any longer. Aaron understood this as a hint to go ; so he took up his hat, and being again assured that his mistress should come to no harm, and once more enjoined to secrecy, he departed, after lingering for a moment, in the hope that Mr. Rawley would offer to accompany him. That gentleman, however, made no motion of the kind ; so he set out alone. His way was through streets dimly lighted, traversing a part of the city notorious for crime and midnight violence. Stealing along like a thief, now muttering a prayer, now an exclamation of

terror, and now startled at the sound of his own footsteps on the stone pavement, he at last reached the door of his home. Cautiously unlocking and closing it, he stole up-stairs and crept into bed, where his heavy breathing soon indicated that he was at rest.

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT nine o'clock one fine morning, Mrs. Dow was sitting complacently in her little back parlor, listening to the singing of a tea-kettle which stood in the grate, and occasionally nodding off into a quiet slumber, when Aaron walked deliberately into the room, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up to his elbows, and a stiff brush under his arm.

His mood was a venomous one ; for he proceeded to drag a mahogany table into the centre of the room, and to polish it with a vehemence which threatened to bring him to the verge of apoplexy.

'I wish he was on that there table, and I had the rubbing him down — that's all,' muttered he, as he paused in his labor to recover his breath. 'And *she* ~~a~~ encouragin' him !' said he, casting over his shoulder a sullen look at his mistress. 'Sixty, if she's a day ; should n't wonder if she was seventy, or even ninety. She looks every hour of it. If that's the small beggar that rung yesterday, I'll wallop him !'

The concluding part of his remark was called forth by a ring at the door-bell, which interrupted the current of his thoughts, though it did not restore his good-humor. Strong in his amiable resolution, he smoothed his hair over his forehead, laid his brush on the table, and proceeded to see who had favored him with this sudden summons.

On the side-walk stood a dwarfish boy in loose pantaloons, with a small cap perched on his head directly over his nose, and his hands thrust to the elbows in the pockets of the pantaloons just mentioned, where he jingled and rattled

a number of small coins with great violence, at the same time looking up the street with an air of profound abstraction. On seeing the door open, he walked gently back, ascended the steps with the leisurely air of a person who had plenty of time on his hands and a great aversion to violent exercise. Eyeing Aaron from head to foot, he said :

‘Hullo ! old feller ! do you live here ?’

The man-servant looked at the stunted marker (for he it was) for more than a minute ; for having come out with the determination of walloping a small beggar, and judging the stunted marker to be nearly of the same dimensions, out of his trousers, and not having entirely resigned his intention, he was casting about in his mind as to the most approved mode of commencing, when he was taken aback by his abrupt salutation. A man of his years addressed in such a tone by a small boy in loose trousers ! He had never met with such a thing in the whole course of his experience. Before he had time to recover from the shock produced by this unheard-of proceeding, the boy, who was growing impatient, said :

‘Wake up ! old beet-nose : you need n’t stare so. I see your peepers ; cussed ugly ones they are too ; but you’ve got a tongue as well as them, ha’ n’t you ? Just rattle it ; ’cos I can’t stand here talking all day to a dumb youngster, if he *does* wear dirt-colored breeches.’

‘It won’t do,’ said Aaron, drawing a long breath. And accordingly he woke up, and inquired of the boy what he wanted.

‘Is there a young woman here by the name of Wiolet Dow ? If there is, trot her out. I want to converse with her.’

‘Mrs. Dow *does* live here,’ replied Aaron ; ‘but’——

‘She does, does she ?’ interrupted the boy. ‘Well, be spry.

Young fellers like you should stir about lively, and leave it to old men like me to crawl. Speak quick what you 've got to say.'

'But —' continued Aaron, as soon as the boy gave an opportunity to the current of his speech to ooze on; 'but' —

'But what?'

'She a' n't a chicken.'

'Oh ho! Past twenty?' said the marker, with an inquiring nod.

'Twenty,' muttered Aaron; 'she and twenty parted company when I was a boy.'

'Thirty — forty — fifty — sixty?' said the marker, just pausing sufficiently between each number to permit Aaron to insert a deliberate assent to each. 'Oh! she's one of them vimmen as get gray, but won't give up. I've seed 'em afore. They're quite common,' said the boy, dusting the sleeve of one arm with the cuff of the other.

Aaron's face brightened into a broad grin, and he began to feel sociably inclined toward his visitor, who proceeded to perch himself on the iron railing, where he sat swinging his feet to and fro.

'You are quite at home, young man,' said Aaron, leaning against the door-post, as if he too had no intention of terminating the conversation.

'Of course I am,' replied the boy: 'I 'spect to spend the morning on this 'ere very rail, unless I sees that voman to-once.'

'You're a strange boy. What's your name?'

Charles Draddy,' replied the other, without hesitation, and swinging his feet with great violence. 'What's your'n?'

'Aaron.'

'Oh ho!' again exclaimed the boy; 'then you 're the man I want!' He placed his finger significantly at the side of his nose, and screwing up his mouth to a point, as if he had no very distant idea of perpetrating a whistle, he said: 'I came from Mr. Fisk, counsellor-at-law. Do you twig?'

Aaron's eyes brightened, and he nodded mysteriously.

'I want to see your young voman herself. No other young voman won't do. Oh no! I guess not. I say, old feller,' said he, sinking his voice, and inserting two of his fingers in his jacket-pocket, and making visible therefrom the end of a piece of paper; 'do you see that?'

Aaron nodded.

'Well, do you know what that is?'

'No, I do n't.'

The boy leaned forward, and said in a low voice, 'It's a *soopeeny*! One of them things as walks old vomen up into court, whether they vant to or not, and squeezes the truth right straight out of 'em, just like the juice out of a lemon.'

'Oh ho!' said Aaron; 'is it about that Wilkins?'

'He's the man,' replied the other: 'but *this*,' said he, touching the paper, 'is for your old voman. Counsellor Fisk and I wants to clap the screws on her.'

Aaron favored the boy with a sagacious wink, as much as to say that he understood his meaning.

'You see,' continued the marker, 'the counsellor spoke to Mr. Rawley, a pertikler friend of mine. You know Mr. Rawley?'

Aaron answered in the affirmative.

'Well, Mr. Rawley knowed a good many of the witnesses what was wanted; and he was to ha' soopeenied 'em all; but he had n't time; so he sent me arter the vun as roosts in this 'ere dwellin'. Now, my little feller, how 'll I find her? She a' n't up to trap, is she?'

‘Not she; not she! I’ll fix that,’ said Aaron; and he forthwith disappeared from the door, and proceeded to the back-parlor, where Mrs. Dow sat with her eyes still fixed on the tea-kettle.

‘A boy wants you at the door,’ said Aaron, bluntly.

‘A boy!’ exclaimed Mrs. Dow, instantly closing the book; ‘did you say a boy?’

‘Yes, I did.’

‘Are you sure it’s only a boy?’ inquired Mrs. Dow, glancing nervously at the glass. ‘Only a boy — not a man?’

‘It’s a boy,’ replied Aaron; ‘and a werry dirty one.’

‘A boy!’ repeated the relict of Mr. Dow, rising and coloring, ‘and a dirty boy, too? Perhaps he’s a small one, Aaron. Small boys *do* sometimes get dirty.’

‘He *is* a small one,’ said Aaron, ‘but he’s old. His years is got the start of his statur.’

‘Where can he come from?’ exclaimed the widow. ‘I’ve heard of boys who came to steal — especially dirty ones. Sometimes they bring letters. Those are generally nice boys; but nice boys will get dirty sometimes. I’ve been so myself occasionally. But I’ll go and see him at once.’

In pursuance of this resolution, Mrs. Dow sallied out into the entry, followed by Aaron.

‘How are you, young voman?’ said the stunted marker, who had already found his way to the room-door, speaking without removing his cap, and looking her full in the eyes, and at the same time nodding sociably.

‘Not very well,’ replied Mrs. Dow, much mollified by a speech which, though a little free in its tone, insinuated that she still maintained the appearance of juvenility: ‘I’ve got a bad cold; quite a bad cold;’ and Mrs. Dow coughed slightly by way of illustration. ‘But I’m better now, thank you; much better, Sir.’

'Your 'spectable mother must feel werry glad; she must feel werry relieved, she must,' said the stunted marker, taking advantage of a momentary embarrassment on the part of the lady, to make a wry face at Aaron, which drove that worthy individual into a corner in strong convulsions, to the imminent danger of his suspenders.

'Oh! Sir, my mother, Sir — I a' n't got no mother, Sir!' answered Mrs. Dow, simpering and coloring.

'Mrs. Violet Dow is the lady in question,' replied the boy gravely; at the same time looking inquiringly at Aaron, who nodded and winked with great vehemence.

'I'm Mrs. Dow,' said the relict.

'No! but you a' n't though? Mrs. Violet Dow, Esq.?'

Mrs. Dow bowed.

'Then I soopeeny you!' exclaimed the boy, thrusting a dirty paper into one of her hands and a piece of money in the other; at the same time flourishing another paper before her eyes. 'You've got the copy, and the fee, and there's the 'riginal. You're in for it, old voman! Won't you be salted when they get you into court? Won't your affections be walked into? Oh no; not a bit!'

Having displayed several extraordinary feats of agility in commemoration of the successful discharge of his task, and terminated them by turning heels-over-head in the entry, a performance in which he was no way impeded by the tightness of his garments, he gave a loud yell, and bolted out of the house, as if shot from a cannon.

'A soopeny!' shrieked Mrs. Dow, holding the paper at arm's length and clutching the money convulsively in the other hand. 'What's the meaning of this, Aaron? What's it about, Aaron?'

'Perhaps you'd better open it and see,' said Aaron. 'It's a very mysterious business, out and out, I think.'

‘Gracious me!’ exclaimed the widow, following his advice. ‘I’m *commanded* by the people of the State of New-York to go to court! Me, a lone widow, to go to a court!—to be exposed to the licentious gaze of a crowded room of at least three hundred male men—without the judge! Bless me! and there’s a penalty too! I’m to pay two hundred and fifty dollars! What will they do with me, Aaron? What do they do with witnesses?’ demanded she, tugging with nervous violence at a brown handkerchief, the end of which dangled from the mouth of a side-pocket.

‘Axes ’em questions,’ replied Aaron. ‘The young gen’leman that just went out says they squeezes ’em just like they squeezes the lemons; but I don’t know nothin’ about that.’

‘*That* I never *will* submit to!’ exclaimed the widow, indignantly; ‘*never!* I’ll die before I’ll submit to *that!* Oh! Aaron!’ said she, suddenly relapsing into the melting mood, as was indicated by her speaking in a broken voice, and blowing her nose with great force, ‘nothing of the kind ever happened to me in the life-time of the late Mr. Dow; nothing!—and he had a great deal to do in law. He foreclosed three mortgages; sent two women to the penitentiary for stealing baby-linen; and once went to see a man tried for running over three hens and a fat child, and I was never soopenied in all these—not once. If he had lived, this never would have come to pass. I am sure of it.’

‘I rather think so myself,’ replied Aaron, gravely.

‘Oh! no; I know it would n’t!’ repeated the widow, sobbing, and again making energetic use of her handkerchief. ‘Something will happen! I know it! I feel it! I shall faint!’ And in pursuance of this resolution she put the money in her pocket and the paper on the table, and sunk into the open arms of the man-servant, who deposited her in an arm-chair, where in the course of time she sobbed herself into a gentle slumber.

Just at the particular time that these things were going on in one part of the city, Higgs was walking sentimentally along in another, with his hands under his coat-tails, indulging a low whistle, pausing thoughtfully at every corner, and looking up and down the streets as if he owned a house in each, and had n't made up his mind which to visit first.

It was a fine soft day, glowing and warm for the season ; and there was a feeling of luxury in idling about — now looking into a shop-window, now pausing to read the signs over the doors, and now drifting along with the crowd — that just suited the taste of Mr. Higgs, and which he fully indulged until he had wandered off to a remote part of the city, where the small size of the dwellings and their mean and dilapidated condition denoted that the very poor had their homes.

There is not much amusement to be found in the haunts of the wretched ; and this idea presenting itself with much force to the mind of Mr. Higgs, he had reclined his person against a lamp-post in front of a mean-looking house, to make up his mind whither to direct his steps, when his attention was attracted to some one speaking in the house.

'Let it be a mahogany one,' said a plaintive voice, which seemed to come from a room on the ground-floor. 'The best is not too good for him ;' a low, half-suppressed sob followed ; 'and tell him,' continued the same voice, 'that he shall be paid soon, if I work my fingers to the bone.' All was quiet for a moment, and then Higgs heard, in a stifled voice : 'God bless you, my boy ! — go !' and a thin, sickly-looking lad came out of the house and ran off at the top of his speed.

It was not long before he returned, panting for breath, and went into the room.

'What do you think, mother ?' said he, earnestly ; 'he would n't let me have it !'

‘Did you tell him all?’ said the same sad voice which Higgs had heard before; ‘what has happened, and how poor we were?’

‘Yes, I did; and he said he would n’t; there was no use in talking about it; that if I wanted a coffin I might go to the poor-house for one; or, for the matter of that, bury him without one. He said *that*,’ continued the boy, sinking his voice so low that Higgs could scarcely hear him, and speaking as if the very idea startled him.

‘Oh! no, no! he could not have meant *that*!’ replied the mother. ‘Bury my poor dead little boy in that way!’—and she sobbed as if her heart would break.

Higgs’s curiosity was excited by what he heard; and he rose and peeped cautiously into the room. It was very small, and every thing in it was wretched and poor. Near the window was a woman, yet young, but with whom sorrow and suffering had done the work of years; and at her side, with his hand clasped in hers, stood the boy who had just returned. They were both bending over a cot on which lay the body of a child of about two years of age. They were too poor to have done much for him, and the same little frock which he had worn when alive was his shroud now that he was dead. His light hair was parted over his forehead. There was a slight color in his cheek, and a smile around his small mouth, as if some angel had stolen away the spirit in an hour of happiness. All was like life; but the dark, sad eye of the mother, and the sorrowful look of the boy at her side, told their tale. The little fellow was resting in the long sleep which has no end; and his childish voice would never again gladden his mother’s heart.

There are spots of gold even in the darkest character; and that bold, bad man, who shrank not from vice and crime, had strange feelings and recollections as he looked upon the

face of that sinless child. Dreams of by-gone days, and scenes and faces which he had long forgotten, swept through his mind, softening his spirit. He wondered if he could ever have been young and innocent like *him*. He looked at the weeping mother, and it brought back to him a faintly-remembered face which had once hovered around him in dreams ; but so long since that he could scarcely remember it ; and then he thought of those who had played with him when they were boys together. Some had died then ; some had grown up into youth, and then they too had died ; some had gone he knew not whither ; others had risen to wealth and respectability ; and some had become stern, hardened men like himself.

Higgs drew back from the window, thrust his hand in his pocket, and walked directly into the house, and into the room where the child lay.

'*There !*' said he, placing a bill for a considerable amount on the table. 'Take that. Bury the boy as you want to. Think of me sometimes ; and if you find it convenient, when you are saying your prayers, put in a good word for me : I need it.' Without waiting for an answer, he turned and left the house.

He had spent much of the day in strolling about, and a clock sounded the hour of three in the afternoon. No sooner did he hear it than he changed his course and struck across to the eastern part of the city. His pace was now steady and rapid, like that of one who had a point of destination which he wished to reach without loss of time. In twenty minutes he stopped in front of a house more than a mile from where he set out. It was a small tavern on the outskirts of the town. A sign had once hung over the door ; but that had long since fallen to the ground, and been left there to decay under the influence of time and storm.

Higgs, however, required no such indication to inform him where he was. He went through the entry with the air of a man perfectly at home; opened an inner door, and entered what appeared to be a kind of sitting-room for visitors. It was dark and gloomy, and redolent of gin and stale cigars. The walls were discolored and stained, and from a pale yellow had gradually tanned into a deep snuff-color. Altogether, it was as cheerless and uncomfortable as might have been expected from the out-of-the-way part of the city and the wretched neighborhood in which the tavern stood. One or two old prints, blackened by smoke and time, hung against the wall; and a dirty sand-box filled with stumps of cigars occupied the middle of the room, near a wooden table with a broken leg. A decrepit tongs and a shovel without a handle were lying together in the chimney-place, in the very centre of which sat a man in a rough great-coat, with his head bent forward, and his hands hanging listlessly over his knees.

Mr. Higgs was at no loss to recognize Wilkins in this person. In truth, it would seem that he expected to find him; for, scarcely favoring him with a glance, he walked up, and slapped him between the shoulders with a degree of friendly violence which seemed to strike the person thus favored as quite unnecessary; for he requested him, when next he addressed him, either to keep his hands off, or to lay them on more gently.

‘Why, what ails you?’ demanded Higgs, abruptly; ‘your flesh a’n’t eggs, is it? It won’t mash at a touch, will it?’

‘What the devil brings you here? What do you want?’ demanded Wilkins, in a surly tone.

Without satisfying either of these inquiries, Higgs went to the table, and looked successively into two pitchers which

stood on it; and having applied his nose to each, he took up the one-legged tongs and hammered lustily on the table.

‘Halloa! what’s the muss?’ bellowed a voice from a small window, opening into an inner room; ‘what you banging that there table for? Don’t you see it’s weak in the j’ints? Peg away at the floor, if you want to knock something; but when you come into a gen’leman’s house, do n’t be a smashin’ his furniter arter that fashion.’

In pursuance of this hint, Higgs shifted his blows from the table to the floor, and knocked with a force that soon brought a slip-shod girl, without stockings, and with remarkably red heels, to know what he wanted.

‘Fill *them!*’ said Higgs, pointing to the pitchers. The girl took them up, eyed the inside very scrutinizingly, and disappearing, in a few minutes returned, and placed them foaming on the table. Higgs, pushing one of them toward Wilkins, buried his face in the other, then, replacing the pitcher with a sigh of satisfaction, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. .

Wilkins had sat watching him in silence until his thirst was satisfied, and then asked, in no very placable tone:

‘What brings you here?—what do you want? Blast me! if I don’t begin to suspect you. You never come near me now-a-days unless there’s something to be got out of me.’

Higgs looked at him as if making up his mind what answer to make, and then said bluntly: ‘Of *course* I want something. You do n’t think I’d come to this out-of-the-way, ungenteel little dram-hole, when there’s respectable places in the city, on purpose to find you, unless I wanted something, do you? If you *do*, you do n’t know me as well as I thought you did.’

‘Well, then, let’s know what it is,’ said Wilkins; ‘and

do n't sit there, staring and gaping as if you had something in your mind you was afraid to tell. You have n't murdered any one, have you ?'

'Pish ! you know I have n't. What the devil ails you, man ?'

'No matter what,' replied Wilkins, not in the least mollified by the interest in his welfare denoted by the question ; and turning his back on the questioner, and stirring the fire.

Higgs, before going into the communication which he had on hand, got up and shut the door. He then went to the small window opening into the other room and shut that, having first looked through it and satisfied himself that the apartment beyond was empty. Returning and drawing a chair so close to Wilkins that even a whisper could be heard, he said : 'I've come here to talk with you about that lawyer, Bolton ; and to let you into a small project I have on foot, before proposing it to him. I knew you were to be here at this hour.'

'Well, what about that man ?'

'You know that you and I and the lawyer are all in the same boat.'

Wilkins looked at him with a troubled glance, but said nothing.

'And you know he's a man that would n't think twice before he'd put a halter round our necks, if we stood in his way.'

'Do n't I know him ?' said Wilkins, in a low, fierce voice : 'do n't I know every corner of his black heart ? I *ought* to. Well, go on.'

'If we were in his grasp,' continued Higgs, in the same subdued manner, 'and he could squeeze a few thousands out of us, and we could n't help ourselves, do you think he'd do it ?'

There was something almost fiendish in the wild mocking laugh that preceded the response of Wilkins, as he said :

‘Do it! He’d wring out the last drop of your heart’s blood for *that*. Ay, he’d d—n you in this world and the next for *that*!’

‘Then,’ replied Higgs, in a stern, determined voice, ‘I’ll show him that *two* can play at that game. This is what I mean. He has showed his hand to the girl—Miss Crawford; he has showed the Will; he has let out that we are the witnesses to it. He’s in for it; there’s no back-out for him. He admitted as much to me. *He can’t go on without us!* But as yet *we* a’n’t committed; for we have only stuck our names to the paper; we have proved nothing, sworn to nothing, and might be seized with a sudden loss of memory, and know nothing about it; or we might have done so only for the *purpose of preventing a fraud*, by blowing on him when we were called on as witnesses.’

‘Well,’ said Wilkins, ‘what’s your drift?’

‘Drift! It’s plain enough,’ replied Higgs; ‘I’ve got a d——d bad memory; and I do n’t believe any thing less than twenty thousand dollars will restore it, in this ’ere identical case. And I’d advise you to have as bad a one too.’

‘But will he pay it?’ demanded Wilkins, earnestly.

‘Pshaw! what can he do? He can’t stop. If he does, he’s d——d. If we do n’t help him, he’s d——d. He *must* do it! Even then he will have a hundred and sixty thousand dollars for his share. He says the old man left two hundred thousand dollars.’

‘My pay is n’t money,’ replied Wilkins, relapsing into his moody humor. ‘He’s to give me service for service.’

‘Make him do that too,’ replied Higgs. ‘If he won’t come in to my proposition, I’ll pay him back the five hun-

dred dollars I've got, and withdraw from the service. This being flush is n't such great things, after all. It's agreeable enough at first; but in the long run, it is n't half so exciting as going on tick, and knowing there's always some one to take an interest in your health. Curse me, how bad Mr. Quagley felt when I was near dying once, and owed him a small bill of forty dollars! His feelings was quite touched.'

Wilkins folded his arms and sat for some time in silent abstraction, giving no other indication of his being awake than by slightly drumming his foot on the floor. At last he said :

'There's a good deal in what you say; yet I've sworn *not* to blow on him; but I have not sworn to stand by him.' Turning to the pitcher, he took a deep draught of the ale, which had hitherto stood neglected at his elbow, and said, 'You shall know what I intend to do, before long.'

Higgs bowed in token of satisfaction; and after a pause of some duration, crossed his legs, leaned back in the chair, and asked :

'What have you done about that divorce? I wish you'd do something soon.'

A change, as rapid as lightning, came over the face of Wilkins, as he replied :

'What's it to *you* what I do, or when I do it? — or if I take six months or a year? — or if I never do it? What's it to *you*, I say?' And he struck his clenched fist, which he had shaken at Higgs during these vehement questions, on the table.

'What's it to *me*?' inquired Higgs, with some surprise; 'that's a good one! Why, d — n it! I told you I intended to marry her myself.'

'By G — d! you shall die first!' exclaimed Wilkins, starting up. 'You mus' n't come interfering between me and

my plans. That girl I cast adrift, because I intend to pay off the ill usage I've had at her hands. She shall live and die alone; wretched, in the very kennel; and let me see you raise a finger to help her! Marry her! *No one* shall! Sooner than *that*, I'd keep her in my own grasp; and if I broke my own heart in doing so, I'd break hers too.'

'It was agreed between us,' replied Higgs, earnestly, 'that I was to prove whatever you wanted; you were to throw her off, and I was to take her. Honor! George, honor! When a gentleman loses his honor, he loses what's precious;' and Mr. Higgs shook his head, as if he experienced feelings of the most poignant regret at the idea of such a dereliction on the part of his friend.

'I agreed to nothing,' replied Wilkins, in the same savage tone; 'and if you attempt to cross me, it will be the bitterest thing you ever did.'

Higgs's policy at present was not to exasperate Wilkins, lest he might, in a fit of stubbornness, come to the resolution of not obtaining the divorce. He therefore merely said:

'We won't quarrel about it. If I was mistaken, I *was* — and there's an end of it. I've not lived to my age to fight about a petticoat. I must be off now. You know we've got to go to the lawyer's to-night.'

Wilkins nodded sullenly.

'Eight o'clock is the hour,' said Higgs; and without further remark he rose and went out.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the same office where he had hatched so much harm, the attorney sat with an expression of countenance which bespoke any thing but mental tranquillity. On the table near him lay a letter written in the peculiar penmanship and worded with the elegance so characteristic of Mr. Higgs, in which, after informing the attorney that he had strong misgivings that they were performing the rather incongruous acts of getting themselves in a box and into a pickle, he appointed that evening to see him, and to discuss their plans. On this letter the attorney from time to time bent his eyes, occasionally removing them to gaze abstractedly around the room. His thin lips moved and twitched nervously, and at times he unfolded his arms, and clasping his long thin fingers about his knees, sat there motionless, looking wistfully in the smoking embers, and dreaming over plans which were corroding his heart, and which, even if successful, were dearly bought. Once, as a voice reached his ear from the street, he straightened himself up and listened; but it sank suddenly into silence, and he relapsed into his old attitude. One might have supposed him dead—for his features were pinched and pale, and had a rigid, unearthly look—but for the brilliancy of those black, glittering eyes, and the low muttering which occasionally escaped him.

An hour or more had passed in this manner, when suddenly a step was heard in the passage below; then one or two heavy, jarring treads, as if a person had stumbled in ascending the stairs in the dark. Bolton shook off his ab-

straction, turned to the table, snuffed the candles, thrust the note which was lying there in his pocket, drew one or two papers to him, and commenced writing. In the meantime the stumbling continued, until the person had surmounted the stairs, and was heard coming through the upper entry. Bolton did not raise his eyes as he entered; but he knew, without doing so, that the tall, gaunt man who strode in was Wilkins. His visitor threw his hat on a chair, and shaking his head to free his face from the long elf-locks which hung over it, drew a chair to the fire, and seated himself opposite the attorney, with the air of one who had every inclination, and only wanted an excuse, to give vent to a long-hoarded and abundant stock of ill-humor.

Bolton wrote on, pretending not to notice him, until he could make up his mind how to meet him. Wilkins, however, soon solved this difficulty, by demanding abruptly:

‘What have you done in that business of mine?’

The attorney raised his head. ‘Ah! Wilkins! it’s you? So you’ve come? I wanted you.’

‘What have you done in that business of mine?’ repeated his visitor, taking no notice of the extended hand of the lawyer, which accompanied the remark.

‘You mean that girl?—your wife?—the drab?’

‘Come, none of that!’ replied Wilkins, with an impatient gesture. ‘I didn’t come here to hear you call names. She’s no drab, and you know it. All you’ve got to do is to look to your work, and keep your tongue quiet. What have you done? I ask again.’

‘As yet, nothing.’

‘Then,’ replied Wilkins, ‘do nothing. Our compact is at an end.’

Bolton laid down his pen; his face became a shade paler, and his voice trembled slightly, as he asked:

‘What now, Wilkins? What do you mean?’

‘Do n’t I speak plain?’ said Wilkins. ‘You want something more, do you? You shall have it; ay, to your heart’s content.’

He rose, took his chair by the back, stamped it heavily on the floor within two feet of the attorney, and sat down. ‘*This* is what I mean. A certain lawyer was to get George Wilkins divorced from his wife; and on condition of his doing so, George Wilkins was to prove a certain signature to a certain paper. Perhaps you understand that?’

Bolton glanced nervously about the room; for Wilkins spoke in a loud and excited key. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘well?’

‘*Well!*’ echoed Wilkins with a bitter laugh; ‘*well!*’ A month went by. The lawyer was pushing his own business on finely; but when Wilkins came to see what had been done in his, the answer was, ‘Nothing yet!’

There was something so unusual in the manner of his visitor, something so reckless and mocking, and withal so savage, that the attorney fairly quailed. ‘Now, what I’ve got to say is this,’ continued Wilkins: ‘I want nothing further at your hands. I want no divorce; and you—*you*, who think of none but yourself; who blight and curse and poison all who come in your path; *you*, d—n you! *you* may prove your Will as you can! May hell seize me if I move a finger, stir a step, or utter a word to save you from the gallows! *Now* you understand me!’

‘I do!’ replied Bolton, whose hesitation vanished at the more imminent danger which threatened from this new resolution of his confederate. ‘I *do* understand you,’ repeated he, in that low, clear, calm tone, so often the voice of strong, concentrated purpose or of bitter wrath. ‘No one could have spoken more plainly. Now hear *me*. You made a promise and confirmed it by an oath, that if I performed a cer-

tain service for you, you would do the same for me. Relying on your good faith, I have taken steps which have compromised my safety beyond recall. I cannot retrace them. I cannot undo what is now done. There is no escape for me, except in going on. That Will is already in the hands of the Surrogate. Your name is to it as a witness ; and prove it you *shall* ! Clench your fist if you will,' said he, grating his teeth, and shaking his thin finger at him ; 'I fear you not. I have you in my gripe. I can tie you neck and heels, and place you where you'll rot. You're mine, and prove that Will you *shall*. There are but three cases in which the law will dispense with your testimony, and allow *your signature* to be proved by another person.'

'What are they ?' asked Wilkins, doggedly

'You must be insane, which you are not ; or you must leave the State.'

'Suppose I won't ?'

'*Then*,' said Bolton, leaning forward, and speaking slowly, 'to get along without your personal testimony, the *law* says you must be DEAD !'

Wilkins sat eyeing him with fixed stare, evincing neither surprise nor fear ; but seeming rather in deep and perplexed thought. At last he said :

'And so, Bolton, you would blow on an old comrade, who had stuck to you through thick and thin, because you had run him too hard once ?'

'I *would*, if he gave out at last,' replied the lawyer.

'And you would forget how often he had served you when none else would ; and you would have him laid by the heels, and locked up, to rot and fester, and beat himself against his prison-walls, and to lie there and rave, and curse the hour that he came into the world ? — would you ?'

'I would !'

‘Or if you did n’t, you ’d send him to kingdom-come, off-hand?’

‘The *law* says that the witness must be *dead*!’ repeated Bolton, sternly.

‘But suppose the man was me, Bolton—your old, tried friend?’ said Wilkins earnestly, drawing his chair closer to the table, and leaning over it, and speaking rapidly; ‘*me*, who know so much of your dark doings?—who never turned my back on you till now?’

‘The law makes no exception for friendship,’ replied the lawyer.

Wilkins drew back. All trace of passion and excitement disappeared from his face. His features became cold, passionless, stone-like; and he spoke like one whose thoughts were far away, as he said:

‘I said blood would come of it, some day; yes, I said it, or I dreamed it; but it’s true!’

He thrust his hand half unconsciously in the breast of his coat, and then drew it out. ‘Well, well!’ said he, ‘I’ll wait—I’ll wait. It may not come to it yet; but it will some day.’

He leaned his cheek on his hand, and gazed steadfastly in the fire, which flickered and smouldered in the grate, giving a wild, uncertain expression to his harsh features. At times he raised his head and looked with a troubled, irresolute eye at the lawyer, and his lips moved as if he were speaking, but no sound came from them. How long a time might have elapsed in silence is uncertain; for before it was broken, a quick step was heard coming up the stairs and through the entry. Then there was a sudden knock at the door, and before it could be answered, the door was flung open, and Mr. Higgs entered the room.

The excited looks of the two who already occupied the

office did not escape the quick eye of the new-comer. He half suspected that a rupture had taken place between them, and by way of inducing an explanation, said :

‘You look amiable, both of you. What’s in the wind?’

Wilkins turned his back upon him, and made no answer.

Higgs cast an inquiring eye upon Bolton.

‘He is faint-hearted, and would give out,’ said he, with a slight sneer, and pointing to Wilkins.

Wilkins merely rolled his eyes up at him, but took no further notice of him.

‘Come, George,’ said Higgs, going up to his friend, and placing his hand familiarly on his shoulder : ‘What’s the matter? Out with it, man.’

‘Pshaw!—*you* know.’

‘Ah! ah! I understand,’ replied Mr. Higgs, into whose mind a ray of the truth flashed. Then, turning to the lawyer, he said : ‘It’s a trifle—quite insignificant; merely this : Mr. Wilkins and myself, on having a small talk respecting this ’ere business, came to the conclusion that there was a great deal of risk and not a great deal of pay ; which you know is quite as disproportioned as a very large dog with a very small tail, or any other figure that may suit the case.’

Mr. Higgs paused to observe the effect of his remark, and of his very appropriate simile. Bolton merely bowed.

‘And we thought,’ continued he, ‘that as the old gentleman had left a cool two hundred thousand, you might fork over to us a cool twenty thousand a-piece : quite a trifle, considering the risk, and the fight that the young woman is determined to make, which you know was altogether unlooked-for, and not at all mentioned in the contract.’

‘And suppose I refuse?’ asked Bolton, impatiently.

‘Then we abjure the proceeding, root and branch. I re-fork the five hundred which the old gentleman left me, a very little diminished, considering the respectability of my appearance for the last week or two ; and we wash our hands of the whole business, and gently retire, wishing you all success in your undertaking.’

‘And this is what you will do ?’

‘Most positively, and decidedly, and so forth,’ replied Mr. Higgs, taking a seat, and crossing his legs.

‘Well,’ said the attorney, after a long pause, ‘will twenty thousand a-piece clear me of all claims from both of you ?—and will you never make others ?—and you will carry this matter through in spite of all obstacles ?’

Both Wilkins and Higgs assented.

‘I see no alternative. It’s yours. Do you want a written promise to that effect ?’

‘No, thank you ; I prefer not,’ said Mr. Higgs, quietly. ‘I’ll find a way of enforcing the promise, if you should happen to forget it.’

Bolton attempted to laugh, but turned away, biting his lip with vexation ; for he felt that he was in the hands of one at least on whom he had no hold, and who neither feared him nor would abate one jot of his power over him, while there was an end of his own to be gained.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Higgs, ‘now that that’s settled to our mutual satisfaction, let’s know what’s the most ticklish part of this business ? What’s the spot as wo n’t bear handling ? That’s what we were to consult about.’

Bolton seated himself, and opening a small drawer in the table, took out a memorandum, and after running his eye over it, said :

‘That witness to the marriage. If he were out of the

way, I'd feel safe. I know of no other obstacle. He's here day after day, on some pretext or other. I don't know what to make of it. If we could get *him* out of the State——'

'Or out of the world?' suggested Higgs.

Bolton looked steadily at him, but said not a word.

'Hist!' exclaimed he, at length. 'Some one is coming. I'll shut this door, and meet him in the other room. Stay here quietly, till I send him off.' As he spoke, he went out, shutting the door, and was heard speaking to a person in the outer room. In a few moments he returned, with a face as pale as ashes. He shut the door after him tight, pushing it to again and again. Then he went up to Higgs and whispered :

'It's the very man! — the old fellow! — the witness to that marriage! the *only* witness!'

His black eyes dilated until they seemed on fire, his lips quivered, and he trembled from head to foot.

'Well?' said Higgs, looking up in his face.

'He's the *only witness to her legitimacy*,' said the lawyer, and he stopped again. 'He's in the other room — *ALONE*.'

'Well,' said Higgs, still looking at him; 'what of it? You won't consent to — you know what? You told me so yourself.'

Bolton, without heeding this remark, said: 'He came here to ask me where he could find Miss Crawford. He came to me as an old friend of her father's. He thought that perhaps I knew and would tell him. He's going there to-night, as *he wants to see her particularly*.'

He paused and looked round at Wilkins; but he sat with his head between his hands, looking on the floor; and then he turned to Higgs, and they both stood face to face. Neither spoke, but the attorney saw that the thin, sharp features of his confederate were rigid and pinched; his jaws firmly

set, as if screwed together, and his lip quivering with fierce emotion.

‘Sit still, both of you!’ said Higgs, in a hoarse whisper; ‘do n’t stir on your lives — neither of you. I’ve often risked my life for less than twenty thousand, and, by G—d, I’ll do it now! Your dirk, George; but no! — no blood; a blow will be better.’ As his hand touched the knob, Bolton’s resolution failed him, and he sprang forward:

‘Stop! stop! my God! my God! I cannot! I dare not!’

‘But *I* dare!’ hissed out Higgs; ‘do n’t balk me now, or, by G—d, you’ll rue it!’

‘What would you do?’ exclaimed the attorney, wringing his hands.

‘Talk to him! *talk* to him! *only* talk to him!’ muttered he. ‘Back, back, I say! Keep the door shut; tight — tight! Ask no questions; see nothing; hear nothing; and do n’t come in that room, or I’ll cut your throat.’

He laid his hand on the door, and Bolton would again have interfered; but Wilkins now rose, seized him by the shoulders, and dashed him back on the floor as if he had been a child; while Higgs flung open the door, and darted into the other room. But it was empty. The outer door was open, and the old man was gone.

CHAPTER XXII.

It needed but a glance at the excited features of Higgs, as he broke from the grasp of the attorney and rushed into the outer office, to see that his mind was made up for murder ; but when he found the apartment empty, and his victim gone, its very quiet and air of desertion brought with it a reaction. It was so hushed, so dim and gloomy ! A faint blaze flickered up from the crumbling fire, and fantastic shadows leaped along the dusky halls, whirling and flitting about like spectres at revel, and apparently beckoning him on. Higgs was a man of little imagination, and not prone to weak fancies ; but for a moment he yielded to a feeling of misgiving. This irresolution however was transient ; for the next instant he turned, and warning the attorney back, sprang through the door, darting along the dark passage and down the tottering stairs, utterly reckless of life and limb in his headlong haste. He heard the echo of retreating footsteps in front of him, but when he reached the street he lost them, nor was there a soul in sight.

It was very dark ; for although the night was clear, there was no moon-light. The house stood in a neighborhood where none cared to linger after night-fall ; a lone, dreary spot, of bad repute, where a blow might be struck or a stab given, and the last cry of the victim be echoed only through the deserted rooms of ruined houses ; or if heard, heard only by those too much accustomed to sounds of suffering and despair to heed them. In such a place Higgs feared no interruption to any act of violence, and he had as little apprehen-

sion of its discovery. Perhaps after a time this man might be missed ; his body found ; a bustle created, and a search made ; but soon, amid the never-ending stir and excitement of this vast city, the matter would blow over, and both the murderer and his victim be forgotten.

With thoughts like these in his mind, he hurried up the street, looking into the houses. The doors of many were wide open ; some because they were deserted and tenantless, others because their occupants were too wretchedly poor to offer temptation for theft or burglary. In one he fancied that he saw the dim outline of a human figure shrinking back as he approached ; but on entering and groping about in the dark, he found that he was mistaken. It was only a door swinging idly in the wind. Feeling his way out, he resumed his search without success. He saw but one person ; a man as savage and reckless as himself, who half paused and eyed him as if he too were on no peaceable errand ; and then went on, hesitating, and looking back until the darkness hid him. Finding his task a fruitless one, Higgs turned on his heel and walked back, endeavoring to solve in his mind the somewhat uncertain problem whether the abrupt departure of the old man was in any manner connected with the conversation which had taken place between Bolton and himself, or was the result of accident.

‘A vigorous old boy he must have been, or he could n’t have hobbled off so fast ! The pettifogger was wrong. There’s no use up about his trotters,’ muttered he, as he stood at the door of the building, straining his eyes to penetrate the gloom which enveloped every thing, and which, in the shadow formed by the irregular angles of the house, assumed a pitchy blackness. ‘He might easily be hid away in this ragged old piece of brick-work. A dozen men might skulk yonder,’ said he, leaning over an area whose

darkness made it seem deeper than it really was. After a vain attempt to carry on his investigations in that quarter, he detached a stone from the crumbling wall and threw it in. A sudden splash followed. 'The house is built over a swamp, I remember. He can't be there. Pah! the smell of the stagnant water is enough to choke one!'

He turned away and stood with his hand on the door-post; and then, relinquishing the search, went in, his slow, deliberate tread jarring heavily along the empty hall. No sooner had it died away than the street-door, which had been so wide open that it touched the entry-wall, was cautiously pushed forward, and a head thrust from behind it. After casting a quick, hurried glance about him, the old witness darted out. Half wild with a vague fear of he knew not what, he darted through the street; now running, now tottering and reeling from age and debility; ever and anon casting a terrified look behind him, as if in dread of pursuit; but still pushing on as if death and delay went hand in hand; and as eager to save the few days of decrepitude which would sum up his span of existence, as if life were in its morning, and his frame full of health and strength. He did not pause nor slacken his pace until he found himself in a wide street where there was a throng of people moving to and fro. When once there, he began to feel secure, and stopped to breathe and to look for some one whom he knew. Hundreds passed him; singly, or in knots of four or five; persons of all classes; some pushing along in haste, others sauntering idly on. And with what varied expression! There was the gay, glad eye of the young and the happy; the buoyant step of hope; and the slow, shuffling gait, the wandering, vacant look, the hollow cheek, and the moody expression of wretchedness and despair. Night is the season when misery stalks forth, and squalid figures, that during the noon-day cower in

hiding-places which the light of the sun never cheers, come forth with the bats and owls, and glide like spectres through the streets.

The old man saw much to sicken his heart ; but the saddest of all was what he could not find—the face of a friend or acquaintance. He had hoped for that. It was an idle hope ; for he had been away many long years ; and those whom he had left young were gray-headed now ; and all was strange where once all had been familiar. He should have gone to the church-yard and looked over the grass-grown grave-stones, and he would have seen there old and long-cherished names ; for most of those whom he now thought of, and whom he had not heard of for years, had laid their heads there, and were sleeping undisturbed by the hum and turmoil of the moving thousands above their resting-places.

He stood for a long time leaning on his stick, and watching the varying crowd. Then, shaking his head sadly, he joined it and drifted on in the living current. Now that he was once more amid the stir of life, he began to wonder what had caused his sudden alarm. He could not tell. The attorney, it was true, had seemed much agitated when he saw him ; had left him abruptly ; had gone into another room, from which had issued the sound of voices in high dispute. Hearing this, he had skulked off ; and that was all. He had heard nothing more. A man had come out, and had even gone into the street to look after him, apparently surprised at his abrupt departure. It was quite natural that he should be so ; and he was an old fool. So thought the witness as he went on ; growing courageous as he left the danger behind him. ‘ Yet it *was* strange too that he should have been seized with such unaccountable terror—for he was no coward ; no, he knew he was n’t ; ’ and he clutched

his stick, struck it fiercely against a post, straightened himself up, and endeavored to feel young and bold as he had once done. But he was old now, and young feelings will no more come to an old frame than young hopes to an old heart. His fatigue and fright had been too much for him; and after going a short distance, he leaned against a railing, resting his cheek upon the cold iron. He stood there so long and seemed so much exhausted, that he attracted the attention of a man standing on the opposite corner, whistling to himself, and with a small rattan beating time to his music on a pile of empty boxes, without seeming to know that he did so. Whatever might have been his object in waiting, he gave it up, and crossing to where the witness was, stood watching him without speaking, but whistling as before. At last he went up to him and said:

‘You seem ill, my good fellow, or tired; what ails you?’

‘I’m old,’ replied the other. ‘Old age is a sickness which has no cure, young man; no cure — no cure! You’ll find it out some day, if you live long enough.’

‘Perhaps I may,’ said the stranger, a man whose powerful and well-knit frame seemed built to bid defiance to time for many years to come. ‘Perhaps I may, and perhaps I may find a home in the ground before that. Who knows?’

‘Who knows, indeed!’ muttered the other. And repeating these words, he prepared to resume his walk, when the stranger continued:

‘I am going the same way, if that’s it?’ He pointed with his stick up the street. ‘And as you seem tired, if you choose you may lean on my arm as far as you go. I’m strong, and it won’t trouble me.’

The old man thanked him, took his arm without hesitation, and they walked on, he talking of the city as it had been when he was young; how it had changed; how the

green fields, with their waving grass and bright flowers, had given place to massive and gloomy piles of brick-and-mortar; how the quiet shady lanes which he had frequented when a boy were now narrow streets, with tall houses frowning down on them from each side. How close and pent up the air seemed to him! He wondered at it too; for he had been used to the city when he was a child; but it was not then what it is now. He had gathered apples in what was now the very heart of this great throbbing metropolis; and where they now were was then far out of town. Things were greatly altered; but he had been absent nearly twenty years, and of course he must expect it; but still it *did* look very strange to come back and find it so changed, and the faces of all about you changed, and no one whom you knew; all dead, or gone off—very few left. ‘God bless me! how full the church-yard must be! How the dead must crowd each other! Ay, and the living too; how *they* crowd and cluster together; so close that one cannot find even an old friend. I’ve been looking for a man for some days,’ said he, breaking off in his rambling conversation; ‘perhaps you knew him?—a Mr. Crawford. I’m told he’s dead, though: it may be true—it may be true; for so many are dead, that it’s like enough he’s gone with the rest of them.’

‘It’s a common name,’ said the other. ‘What was his first name?’

‘I’ve forgotten—I’ve forgotten. The lawyer knows: but he did not tell me. If I could recollect that, I could find him without trouble.’

‘It will not be easy without knowing that,’ said the stranger. ‘There are many of the name; still, it can be done. I am going in here,’ said he, stopping in front of an eating-house and pointing in the door. ‘I have a keen appetite, and, late as it is, have not yet dined. So I’ll bid you good-bye.’

‘I’m scarcely less hungry than you are,’ replied the old man, looking at the house. It was a tempting place, snug and old-fashioned. There was a flood of light within, and through the half-opened door came the flashing blaze of a fire. Every thing about it had a cheerful and comfortable appearance ; while the street was dark and cheerless, and, though crowded with living souls, was lonely to one to whom they were all strangers. A companion was a pleasant thing to him ; and so, without much reflection, and somewhat to the surprise of his new acquaintance, he followed him in, and seating himself, cast an investigating eye toward a table which stood in the middle of the room, covered with viands of various descriptions ; serving both as a bill of fare and as a temptation to the appetite. At one end of the apartment, on a small stool, sat a red-faced lady with a large head and a small cap on the top of it, a little the worse for wear. But the wearer was of an amplitude which spoke well for the nutritious qualities of the larder, and fully atoned for any deficiency in the dimensions of her head-gear. On seeing the visitors, by a sudden motion of her feet she caused herself to revolve rapidly on the stool, and looking very hard through a small door, opening into a dark depository, she called : ‘Tim !’

‘Halloa !’ responded Tim.

‘Two gen’lemen’s waitin’ to be sarved.’

‘Oh !’ said Tim ; and he forthwith appeared in the shape of a large boy, with an uncombed head and his shirt-sleeves tucked up. Having received the orders of the two visitors, he with equal alacrity communicated those orders to his mistress, and she, with a celerity quite remarkable in a person of her size, set about fulfilling them, so that but a short time elapsed before a dish of smoking meat was on the table before them, and they both fell to ; one with the high relish

of youth, and the other with the keen appetite of long abstinence.

‘Ha!’ said the old man, plying his knife and fork vigorously, and occasionally pausing to wipe his mouth on the end of the table-cloth; ‘once taste the food, and appetite comes. Yet not half an hour ago I had a fright which I could well-nigh have sworn would have kept me without one for a month. Well, well; man is a strange animal!’ And as if the arriving at this conclusion was a settlement of all his difficulties, he again thrust his fork into the dish and ate with renewed vigor.

His companion, who had been equally busy, with this difference, that he did not speak at all, at last laid down his knife and fork, and pushing his plate from him as if he had finished, inquired what had frightened him.

‘Ay, you may well ask! you may well ask!’ said the old man, shaking his head gravely; ‘for I can scarcely tell myself. When I was young like you, I would not have turned for a troop of mounted horsemen; but I am old now, young man, and old age is shadowed by care, and fear, and suspicion. When the ability-to resist danger leaves one, the fear of it becomes stronger. Timidity and decrepitude come together. And *he*,’ said he, half-speaking to himself, ‘is a man one does n’t like to be alone with; and it’s a dark old place that he lives in; and he *did* look strangely when I spoke to him to-night—indeed he did! He was so white, and his hands shook, and his voice was husky, and his eyes glassy. No, no! It was n’t *all* fancy; and he slunk off with a slow, stealthy step, like a cat when she steals on a mouse. No, no!—it was n’t for nothing that I was frightened.’

‘I’m all in the dark,’ said the stranger, who sat listening with no appearance of great interest, but still amused at the earnest manner of his companion. ‘Who was the man

that scared you? and what was it all about? Tell me — come.'

'I told you before,' said the other, 'that I was looking for a Mr. Crawford. Did n't I?'

The stranger nodded.

'Well, it was about him. I lived with him many a long year ago, when he was young — before he was married. A gay young fellow he was too; ay, and I was at his wedding; a runaway match — his friends never knew it. There was only I and Daniel Ripley — poor fellow! but he's dead and gone, and the parson's dead, and Crawford's dead, and his wife's dead — all dead but me! It's very strange! But I suppose my turn will come soon. Well, they were married, and shortly afterwards I went away, and have been gone nearly twenty long years. I came back two weeks ago. I went to inquire where Mr. Crawford lived, for I wanted to see him. I found that a man had been looking for me, and asking whether I was alive or dead. He said that he was an old friend of Mr. Crawford's, and his name was Bolton; a lawyer — Reuben Bolton.'

'Ha!' exclaimed his listener, who had hitherto been leaning back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on the old man's face, for no other purpose than that of giving him an opportunity of indulging his garrulity: 'ha! what did you say the lawyer's name was?'

'I told you that before — Reuben Bolton. He knew where Mr. Crawford lived; so I went to him to ask, and he questioned me as to what I wanted, and about *him*, and about his marriage; and then he told me that he was dead, and that he believed he had left no children.'

'Well, go on!' said the other, now listening with keen attention. 'He said that he had left no children, did he? What then?'

'Yes, he said so; but he said he'd ask, and let me know.

I told him that I had a longing to see any one of the old man's kin. I loved him, for he was kind to me years ago; and although I had forgotten his first name, I had not forgotten that. But names will never stay in my head. My memory fails,' said he, tapping his wrinkled forehead, and shaking his head; 'it shows I'm growing old.'

'Well, did you see him?'

'Yes, I went there; and he said Mr. Crawford was dead, and had left no children.'

'The liar!' muttered the stranger, between his teeth. 'Well, go on.'

'He told me *that*, and that he never *had* had any; but I knew better,' continued he, rubbing his hands with much apparent glee. 'I knew that he *had* a daughter; and I told him so. And so I did n't believe the rest. He seemed vexed and uneasy at having been misinformed, and said he'd ask again, and wished me to come to-day.'

'Did you go?' inquired the other.

'Yes, I did. It's a very dreary place at night, and I felt a strange sinking of the heart as I was going up the stairs; and I thought I heard something whispering in my ear to keep away. It was very dismal; and the old house moaned and seemed like an old ghost, so that when I got to his room I was nearly frightened to death; and when he stepped out and met me, I thought the Devil himself had come. There he stood twisting his fingers; his eyes on fire; his lips quivering and trembling as if he had an ague-fit; and at last he stole into the inner room, and there was something in his eye so devilish that I grew faint-hearted, and hurried out without waiting for him to come back. You see I'm old now, *very* old. I would not have done so many years ago; but I'm easily frightened now, and I heard men quarrelling and whispering in the back room, and a struggle. There might have been a murder doing there. I do n't know — I

do n't know ; but there might have been — there *might* have been. I've heard of such things.

'Is that all?' said the young man.

'That's all. I was coming away when I met you.'

'Well,' said the stranger, 'I can help you to what you want. The man's name was John Crawford. He *is* dead, and *has* left a daughter, who is now alive, and no doubt will be glad to see you. Her father died a few weeks since, and by his Will gave all his property to this Bolton, and to his daughter — nothing.'

'I do n't believe it!' exclaimed the old man, positively.

'I do n't believe it! I'll go to her and tell her so.'

'Well, you can do as you like,' said his companion ; and taking a piece of paper from his pocket, he wrote a few words upon it.

'There's the name of the street and the number where she lives ; and there,' said he, 'if you want at any time to make further inquiries of me, is my name and address.' As he spoke, he added something to the bottom of the paper. 'I must leave you now, for I have overstayed my time, and am to meet a man on business.'

'Thank you, my young friend,' said the old man, taking his hand ; 'you've been very kind to me. The young do n't often think of the old ; but *you* have, and I thank you for it. I'll rest here awhile, and then go on. God bless you!'

The young man turned his frank, good-humored face toward him, and bidding him good-night with a merry voice and a warm shake of his hand, he called the servant, paid his reckoning, and went out.

When he was gone, the old man drew a candle close to him, put on a pair of old iron spectacles, held the paper to the light to ascertain the name of his new friend, and read the words : 'JOHN PHILLIPS, No. 96, — street.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

LATE that night Phillips sat in his own room, pondering over the words of the old man whom he had so oddly encountered. The more he thought them over, the more weight they seemed to have. Could it be that he knew more than he had expressed, when he so boldly denied his belief that Mr. Crawford had disinherited his daughter? And was it possible that Lucy was right, when in her interview with him she had declared that Will to be a forgery?

'It must be so!' exclaimed he, starting from his chair, and pacing the room; 'and I have been duped by that scoundrel Higgs. I might have known that truth never came from such a source as that. Lucy was right. She spoke positively; it was no vague suspicion; she said she knew it and could *prove it*. The lawyer too, he trifles with the old man; he lies to him, to keep him from seeing Miss Crawford. He was *afraid* that they should meet — that was it! Yet, what could that old man have to do with Mr. Crawford's concerns, that Bolton should dread his seeing his daughter? I cannot understand it — yet there must have been a reason for it. What *could* have frightened that gray-headed old man to-night? His *look* — what was there in that?' He stopped in the middle of his walk, in deep thought: 'That might have been fancy. It *must* have been; for he would not dare to — Well, well,' continued he, breaking off in his musing; 'I'll see Lucy to-morrow. Poor girl! she must think me lukewarm indeed.'

Phillips was one of those who earn their bread by the

sweat of their brow ; and it was not until the following afternoon that he was at leisure to direct his steps toward Miss Crawford's residence. His way lay past the office of the attorney ; and as he looked up at the crumbling walls, he could not help cursing them in his heart, and wishing that they might some day fall to the ground and crush in their ruins the dark schemer who had his nest there.

Just at the hour when Phillips was on his way to Lucy, a female was walking slowly along a narrow street in the upper part of the city. This was Lucy ; but Lucy sadly altered — feeble and wasted ; her frame worn down by sorrow and anxiety. She paused frequently to rest, and looked listlessly about her, as if her thoughts were far away. Few noticed her ; for there was little in the outward appearance of the meanly-dressed girl to attract attention. A loiterer, as he passed, might glance at her frail figure, and at the lustrous eyes, so deep and dark that it seemed as if the very soul were looking out of them, and wonder who she was and what she did in the streets, and whether she would live through the winter ; and his eye might even sadden ; but before he had reached the next street she was forgotten.

But if they thought not of her, she thought as little of them. She had but one motive of action now, and that was a burning desire to extricate her husband from the influence of Bolton. The fear of what might happen to him, and that she might not be successful in foiling the attorney, had made the havoc of years in her appearance ; had robbed her of her look of youth, and had stamped upon her brow that expression of deep and sad thought which time alone should bring.

If she was feeble when we last saw her, she was far more feeble now. Her breath was short and labored ; her cheek pale, transparent, and colorless, except a single bright spot

in it, brilliant and glowing, as if the last rays of life were lingering there before they departed for ever. Still there was something so restless and earnest about her, that it seemed as if an eager, powerful will were taxing her debilitated frame beyond its strength. She never murmured ; but there was something painful in her sad smile as she surveyed her own attenuated form, when she was obliged to pause from fatigue. She felt that in all else except earnest devotion of heart and fixedness of purpose, she was not the same that she had been a short time since, when she spent the whole day in search of her husband. Her heart was very heavy now ; for she had no hope of his love to cheer her on : no, no ; he had crushed that ! Her strength too was gone ; but what of that ? She could still move about, and while she could do that, something might yet be done for him. She felt at times a strange sensation of weakness ; but that would soon wear off, she thought, and she had no other ailment. She was still young ; her eye was not heavy, and her cheek was very bright. And so she dreamed on, forgetting herself, thinking only of Wilkins ; and in her plans and schemes for his welfare, unconscious of the cloud that was gradually covering her with its dark shadow.

It was a work of time for her to reach her place of destination, which was no other than Bolton's office ; for thither she had resolved to go ; to see the lawyer herself ; to use tears, entreaties, arguments, and, if necessary, even menaces ; and she thought that she knew enough to bend him to her will. At all events, it was worth the trial.

As she went on, engrossed in her own thoughts, she did not observe that for some distance she had been followed by a man who kept her always in sight, loitering slowly to keep pace with her ; and it was not until she came in sight of the

house in which the lawyer's office was, that he walked up and touched her gently on the shoulder.

'Lucy!'

The girl started; a slight flush passed over her face, as she saw who it was; and a faint smile flickered about her mouth; but it went as soon as it came.

'Ah! Jack!' said she, 'you see I haven't given up yet. I'm going *there*!' She pointed to the dilapidated building which loomed up against the sky. 'I will see the lawyer myself; and perhaps when he hears what I have to say, and knows that I am *his* wife, and that my heart is breaking, he will find some means of extricating George rather than have my death at his door. They say he is a skilful lawyer, and perhaps he will do that. I can but try, you know,' said she, with a faint smile; 'and if I succeed, I feel as if I should be quite well, though I am very faint now, and a very little wearies me.' As she spoke, she pressed her hand against her side, and her breath came quick and fluttering, like that of a wounded bird.

'Let me go with you, Lucy,' said Phillips, earnestly; 'let me go with you to protect you from insult; for, believe me, you will need protection. *Do*, Lucy; dear Lucy, *do*! I will not open my lips unless he treats you ill. You shall do every thing, and say every thing. Only let me be with you; and let him see that you have at least one friend left. It will obtain for you a milder answer and a more patient hearing. I will not say a single word. I will stand by only as your protector. Will you, Lucy?'

The girl shook her head. 'No, Jack, it cannot be. You know why already. You know what suspicions are in George's mind respecting you and me; and God forbid that I should do aught to give even color to them. No, Jack, I thank you; from the bottom of my heart I thank you; and under

other circumstances I would gladly accept your offer. But now I cannot. I must go alone; and whatever is in store for me I must meet — and God give me strength to do so with a good heart! Good-bye, Jack; I'm wasting time. God bless you!' She made a slight motion of her hand, as if bidding him farewell, and attempted to smile; but her lips trembled, and the tears gushed in her eyes as she left him.

Bolton was sitting at a table, engaged in examining a bundle of papers, when the door opened and Lucy entered. He had never seen her, except on the night of his interview with Miss Crawford, and did not now recognize her. Observing only a meanly-dressed female, he might have made some uncourteous answer to her question whether he was at leisure, for the poor were not welcome visitors at his door; but he observed that she was exceedingly beautiful, so he told her to take a seat.

Lucy merely bowed, and although she grew deadly pale, she remained standing. Bolton paused, and looked at her as if to inquire what she wanted.

'My name is Wilkins,' she said, with some effort; 'Mrs. George Wilkins.'

A shade passed across Bolton's face, and it might have been that his eye grew troubled; but his manner was calm.

'I have the pleasure of knowing your husband. I am happy to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Wilkins also.'

He said nothing more.

'I presume,' said Lucy, after a pause, 'that you do not recollect having seen me before?'

Bolton looked at her earnestly, and ran over in his mind a long list of those whom he had ruined and beggared. Her husband was one of them; but Lucy he had never seen; and he shook his head as he said: 'I do not.'

‘And yet you *have* seen me,’ said Lucy quietly.

Again the lawyer fixed his eye on that wasted face, and dreamed over the past. It well might have belonged to one of his victims ; but he could not remember it ; and he asked where it was.

‘At Miss Crawford’s,’ said Lucy, firmly. ‘You may recollect the evening you first brought a Will there.’

Bolton looked suspiciously at her ; but whatever emotion he might have experienced, he evinced none, and said nothing.

‘A Will,’ continued she, ‘which gave to you all Miss Crawford’s property, and left her nothing.’

‘I am aware of its contents,’ said the lawyer. ‘Well?’

‘Who made that Will?’ demanded Lucy.

Bolton moved uneasily in his chair, and asked : ‘What’s this Will to you?’

‘Much!’ replied Lucy, ‘much! I wish to God that it was not! Will you answer my question?’

‘My good woman,’ said Bolton, coldly, ‘my friendship for your husband would lead me to treat you with all due respect. But as this is a matter which does not concern you, I must decline speaking on the subject. I am not in the habit of making my own private affairs the subject of conversation with strangers, especially with strange women.’

Lucy’s heart beat violently, and she grasped the top of a chair to support herself, as she said :

‘I came here to perform a duty ; and perform it I will, if I die!’

The paleness which overspread her face seemed reflected in that of the lawyer.

‘That Will was signed by Mr. John Crawford,’ said Lucy, in a clear, distinct voice : ‘and it was witnessed by my husband and one William Higgs. Is not that what you say?’

The attorney made no reply

‘Be it so!’ said Lucy; ‘whether you speak or are silent, the facts are the same. That Will is a forged one. I *know* it to be so. I can *prove* it; and I came here to tell you so, before you or my husband were gone too far for your own safety.’

‘Words! words! — idle words!’ said the attorney. ‘What wild phantasies women *will* get in their heads! Miss Crawford, without the slightest reason, calls this Will a forgery, and sends you to echo her cry; as if a woman’s din could frighten me, or a repetition of the cry of ‘forgery’ could prove an authentic instrument a counterfeit! If this is all you have to say, you may save your time and breath.’

‘And is it so?’ said Lucy, earnestly. ‘You *will* go on in this criminal transaction! You have already involved my husband in ruin, and will sink him yet deeper. Will nothing induce you to spare him? Oh! think of what he was and of what he now is — a poor, wretched, broken-down man; and do not make him worse. Do not make him one who cannot look his fellow-men in the face. You have blighted him already. For God’s sake, leave him a quiet conscience! I will be as secret as the grave. I’ll never breathe what I know to a human being; and I will bless you and pray for you — you, who have been a curse to him and me — if you will but let him escape this last and greatest sin of all!’

‘So you have come to entreaties at last,’ said Bolton, with a sneer: ‘I expected it. But you waste breath,’ continued he, sternly. ‘That Will shall be proved; but at the same time I tell you that it is authentic.’

‘And *I* tell *you*,’ exclaimed Lucy, in a clear, loud tone, ‘it is *not*. I tell you that it is forged, and bears its falsity on its very face.’

She leaned forward and whispered in the ear of the law-

yer. He made no reply, but sat as if frozen ; not a muscle moved. His face became ghastly and livid ; his eyes opened and glared fixedly in their sockets, and his hand rested listlessly on the table, but it did not stir.

Lucy, frightened, ran to the door to call for help. This brought the attorney to himself. Starting up, he caught her arm.

‘Come back!’ said he sternly ; ‘come back ! I say. You shall not leave this room till I have heard more. Is what you have told me true?’ demanded he, fiercely ; ‘true, by the God of heaven?’

‘It is.’

‘And who can prove it?’

‘There are fifty at least,’ said Lucy. ‘Will you go on now?’

‘I *must*! Do you hear *that*, woman? I *MUST*! Hell is before me and hell is behind me! Fifty can prove it; but it may never reach their ears. *You* alone are ready to do so; and you—*you dare not*!’

‘Indeed, for my husband’s sake, I dare do any thing.’

‘For his sake, for *his* sake, you dare not!’ exclaimed Bolton; ‘for, by G—d! you’ll condemn *him* if you do! He is an accomplice in the fraud, and will go the State’s-prison for ten years. That’s screening him with a vengeance!—screening *him* who, at this very moment, is contriving the shortest mode of getting you out of his way, except by cutting your throat. Ha! ha! it makes me laugh!’ and the attorney laughed so wildly that it made the poor girl shudder. But there was something in his last words that startled her more than all else; and she waited till he was more composed, and then asked his meaning.

‘Simply this,’ replied Bolton, with a sneer: ‘I have received instructions from your husband to commence proceed-

ings against you in the Court of Chancery, to obtain a divorce, on the ground of adultery on your part with one John Phillips.

Lucy shrank as if blighted. Her fingers worked convulsively, and she closed her eyes as if to shut out some painful sight, and then she asked in a whisper :

‘Is this true?’

‘True as you live,’ replied Bolton, coldly.

‘And will you swear to it?’

‘I will,’ replied Bolton. ‘Do you wish further proof?’

‘No, no!’ The next moment the lawyer was alone. She stole out of the room and down the stairs, like a cowed and guilty thing. Jack Phillips met her at the door and spoke to her; but she did not notice him. Her step was irregular and unsteady; and she seemed as though she would fall. He joined her, and walked at her side; and she did not forbid him, nor did she seem aware of his presence. He spoke to her; but she made no answer. Once or twice she paused to gain breath, and looked him full in the face, and there was so much agony in that look, that he dared not inquire further; but he drew her arm in his, and in silence accompanied her until they came to Miss Crawford’s house. Here he stopped.

‘One word, Lucy,’ said he: ‘you know I would do any thing for you, and I feel as deeply interested in your welfare as if you were my own sister — indeed I do. Tell me what success you had with the lawyer. Is there any hope?’

‘Only in heaven! — only in heaven!’ exclaimed she; and drawing her arm from his, she hurried into the house.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE attorney stood like a statue, as Lucy went out, neither moving nor speaking to interrupt her. He heard her steps as she went down the stairs. He even counted them; for his sense of hearing seemed to have gained ten-fold acuteness; but at last she was out of hearing, and he had nothing left but his own thoughts. Still he remained in the same posture of intense attention; but the words which dropped from his lips showed that his mind was running on the one engrossing scheme of his present life.

‘Fool! dolt that I was, to have committed such a shortsighted blunder! Why, the veriest ass that knocks his head against a law-book, and calls himself a lawyer, could not have made a fouler one. To be balked too by a girl; a mere *girl*, like she whom that old man has left behind him! To see her in possession of his property! and myself—where? God only knows! And all by my own cursed folly! It will drive me mad!’

The attorney fairly gnashed his teeth, as he strode up and down the room, after this last out-break of chagrin.

She would have me grovelling in the very dust; crushed, blasted; a thing for the world to hiss at; my name a by-word for all that is vile and hateful; myself pointed out as the plotting, scheming, shallow-headed fool, who had not brains enough to outwit a girl in her teens! Pah! it sickens me!’

For a long time Bolton paced that room, scourged by the demons which his own fears had raised; and then he set to

work to see if there *was* no escape from the evil which threatened him.

The fact which Lucy had communicated, and which had so startled him, that in the first moment of apprehension he had betrayed himself, was this : The Will was dated on the tenth of August ; and of course purported, unless the contrary were shown, to be executed on the same day. But during the whole of that month, both Higgs and Wilkins were absent from the city, and consequently could not have witnessed its execution.

‘It’s too late to alter the date,’ muttered Bolton ; ‘for that is already known. They must swear that it was signed on some other day ; and we’ll contrive some way to account for the discrepancy between the date and execution. Such a variation, with a plausible reason for it, will not affect the validity of the Will.’

He went to a shelf, took down a number of books, turned over the leaves of several of them, and was soon engrossed in deep study. ‘I’m safe on that point,’ said he at last, throwing the book from him ; but even as he spoke, the color fled from his cheek, and his look of satisfaction was succeeded by one of the most sickening fear. He muttered in a whisper so low that he seemed almost afraid to breathe it to himself : ‘Can I have told any one that it was executed on the tenth of August ? If so, God help me, or I’m lost !’

It was a strange appeal, from such a man, in such a cause. Every conversation which he had ever had respecting that Will returned to his memory, as clearly and distinctly as if it had taken place but an hour before. Many had spoken to him about it, for it was noised abroad that the rich Mr. Crawford had disinherited his only child to give his property to a stranger. The world had its say ; and people shrugged their shoulders, and shook their heads ; but the attorney was

a man whom few liked to grapple with ; so they kept their thoughts to themselves.

Every word, every person who had ever alluded to this matter with him, the lawyer heard and saw in his mind as palpably as if each were standing before him, flesh, bone, and blood. Some had jested with him ; some had congratulated him ; and not a few had listened to his tale with down-cast eyes, and had left him without a word. He was surprised that every thing presented itself to him so distinctly ; for trifles hitherto unheeded sprang up, like phantoms of the dead from burial-places where they had long lain forgotten.

He had said much which it would have been better for his cause that he should never have uttered ; but he had not thought so at the time ; for he had resolved to show no apprehension on the subject of the Will ; and although he never introduced it, he never shrank from it when others did. He remembered too that he had mentioned the fact which he so much dreaded to several ; but he had done it in a casual manner ; and he hoped that it was forgotten by them. The only time that he had boldly and unequivocally asserted it was on the night that he produced the Will at Miss Crawford's house. None were present then except herself and Lucy. The first could not be a witness ; the last *would* not, lest she might blast the character of her husband. Then he remembered what he had just told her respecting Wilkins's intentions toward her ; and a fear crossed him, that this might change her love of her husband into hate. If so, and she appeared as a witness, and told what she knew, and what she had that day seen and heard, he felt that his ruin was certain. But that was a risk which could not be avoided. All others could ; and he determined to shut his eyes to his danger, and to apply himself to guard

those points which could be defended. It is scarcely necessary to trace his course, or to detail particularly the nature of the conferences which he had with Higgs and Wilkins, in arranging his plans.

Before the day for proving the Will arrived, he received a notice that Mr. Fisk had been retained as proctor on the part of Miss Crawford. Unwilling to trust to himself alone, in a matter where he ran so much risk, he engaged the professional services of Mr. Whitman, a man of eminent legal abilities, and of unimpeachable integrity. There was policy in this; for Bolton, although reckless and unprincipled, knew full well the influence which a fair name has with the world, and that the very fact of having such a man as Whitman enlisted on his side would tell strongly in his favor. He fabricated a specious tale of his case, which completely enlisted the legal sympathies of the lawyer, who, although he might have regretted that a young girl had been stripped to enrich a man like Bolton, still felt that Bolton had rights which ought to be protected. All that his case admitted of, Bolton had done; and he now awaited the result with a degree of calmness in which there was a strong mixture of desperation.

The day appointed for the trial at last arrived. It was a bright morning, and all the world which thronged the streets seemed gay and glad; far unlike the gaunt, spectre-like man who sat in the back office of the crumbling house already so often mentioned. Mental anxiety had done its work on the attorney. Thin he always was; but he had become so meagre and lank, that his flesh seemed to have been starved away, until his skin covered only a skeleton. Although there was a daring concentration of purpose in the burning eyes which glared from beneath his black brows, yet on that day, at intervals, a feeling of terror, the most abject and

paralyzing, overwhelmed him, crushing him to the very earth, and sweeping before it every trace of hope and resolution. The next moment came a reaction; and he sprang up, erect; his eyes flashing, his brow knit, and undaunted in purpose. After one of these fits of temporary weakness, he walked up and down the room until he was perfectly calm. He stopped and laid his hand on his heart. Its pulsations were slow and regular. He took up a small looking-glass which hung in a corner, and examined his own face. It was wasted, and even ghastly. He looked into his eyes, and smiled. 'No cowardice *there* at least!' said he. He was never more collected. He turned over his papers, examined them, ran his eye over some relating to other matters than the Will; paused to correct them; made a few trifling alterations in the punctuation; and then carefully tied them up and laid them on the table. There was a speck of dust on his coat. He got up, reached a brush and brushed it off. He was surprised at his own composure; for he felt that it certainly was a most momentous day for him. At times his mind wandered off; but he felt no alarm; for he was thinking of things far away. There was a glass of water on the table; and he caught himself shaking it, and watching the wizard circles made by its reflection on the ceiling. He wished that the hour for proving the Will would come. He threw himself back in his chair, and drew out his watch. Ten o'clock was the appointed time, and it was now but nine. The minutes lagged heavily until half-past nine, and then Higgs and Wilkins made their appearance. He had already drilled them in their parts so that there was nothing to be done. He conversed with them on indifferent subjects while he was putting on his hat and coat. He felt uncommonly merry, and jested as they went into the street. The matter-of-fact appearance of every thing there, however, gradually

recalled him to a more natural state of feeling. His apathy wore off; his mind recovered a more healthful though a less comfortable tone; and it was with a feeling of deep anxiety that he found himself in the Surrogate's office.

The office consisted of two rooms, with thick, massive walls, communicating by a small door. The floor was of stone, scantily covered with straw matting. On shelves against the wall were rows of heavy volumes, in which were registered the last wishes of thousands who had long since died and were forgotten. Documents of various kinds—bonds, blank letters of administration, old Wills, and fragments of paper, were scattered over the desks and tables, at one of which sat an old man in spectacles, with a frizzled wig, copying a ragged Will in a large book with a red cover. As they entered, he rubbed his eye with the knuckle of his fore-finger, at the same time opening his mouth to facilitate the operation, and took no further notice of them than to point with the feather-end of his quill to the inner office, in which a number of persons were already collected. In the middle of this room was a round table covered with green baize, with a smaller table behind it, at which table sat Mr. Jagger, the Surrogate. He was a short, fat man, with a bald head and a beetle-brow, beneath which glowed a pair of red-rimmed, wrathful eyes, that seemed to nourish a grudge against every one, and dead men in particular.

Bolton arrived before the time; yet he had scarcely entered the office, when his proctor made his appearance. He was a tall man, with a dark, cadaverous face, and loosely made, as if hung together at the joints with hooks-and-eyes. He had a nervous habit of twitching at his watch-chain when much excited, and of gnawing the end of his quill. He was constitutionally irritable; but had his temper so much under control that at a trial of a cause few would

have perceived this failing ; although an unlucky witness, during his cross-examinations, would occasionally find the air of a court-room very oppressive, and extremely conducive to profuse perspiration. But with all his irritability, he was a good-hearted man, and rigidly correct in conduct.

He walked quietly across the room, bowed to the Surrogate, and taking a seat in one corner, thrust his hand in a pocket of immeasurable depth, and drew out a bundle of papers secured together with red tape. Untying these, he carefully selected one, and commenced reading, taking no further notice of any one.

As it approached the hour of ten, Bolton became more restless. He got up, walked to and fro, stopped suddenly, took out his papers, fingered them over, as if looking for a particular one ; then laid them down, without having seen one of them, and crossed over to where Mr. Whitman was sitting, whispered a joke in his ear, laughed loudly, and turned suddenly away and took a seat. Mr. Whitman looked at him sternly and inquisitively. He liked not the man ; but he supposed his cause to be legally a just one, and therefore waived all personal feeling. There was something strange in the manner of Bolton ; but he knew that he had much at stake, and attributed his eccentricity to that. After staring at him for a moment or two, he again turned to his papers.

Just then the door opened, and Mr. Rawley walked in, and close at his heels stalked Bitters. Both seated themselves ; the one on a chair, the other on end directly in front of the Surrogate. Mr. Jagger looked at the dog with the solemn eye of a surrogate, and shook his head as only a surrogate can shake it.

‘Are you one of the witnesses ?’ inquired he of the dog’s master.

‘I am, Sir,’ replied Mr. Rawley. ‘I was subpoenaed to testify ; and here’s the document.’ As he spoke, he laid upon the table a paper which, from having been several days in that gentleman’s pocket, had faded from white into a snuff-color, and was particularly crumpled.

‘What’s that animal doing here?’ demanded the Surrogate.

‘He has n’t had time to do any thing,’ replied Mr. Rawley. ‘He comes when I come. He goes when I goes. He’s a peeler.’

‘The animal must leave the court. It’s contempt of court to bring him here,’ said Mr. Jagger, angrily. ‘Remove him instantly.’

Mr. Rawley had frequently been in attendance at the police courts, and once or twice had had a slight taste of the Sessions ; so that he was not as much struck with the Surrogate as he otherwise might have been ; and he replied :

‘I make no opposition, Sir ; and shall not move a finger to perwent it. There’s the animal ; and any officer as pleases may remove him. I say nuffin’ ag’in it. I knows what a contempt of court is ; and that a’ n’t one.’ And Mr. Rawley threw himself amiably back in his chair.

‘Mr. Slagg!’ said the Surrogate to the man with a frizzled wig, ‘remove the dog.’

Mr. Slagg laid down his pen, took off his spectacles, went up to the dog and told him to get out ; to which Bitters replied by snapping at his fingers, as he attempted to touch him. Mr. Rawley was staring abstractedly out of the window. The dog looked up at him for instructions ; and receiving none, supposed that snapping at a scrivener’s fingers was perfectly correct, and resumed his pleasant expression toward that functionary, occasionally casting a lowering eye at the Surrogate, as if deliberating whether to include him in his demonstrations of anger.

‘Slagg, have you removed the dog?’ said Mr. Jagger, who, the dog being under his very nose, saw that he had not.

‘No, Sir. He resists the court,’ replied Mr. Slagg.

‘Call Walker to assist you,’ said Mr. Jagger, sternly.

Walker, a small man in drabs, had anticipated something of the kind, and had accidentally withdrawn as soon as he saw that there was a prospect of difficulty ; so that the whole court was set at defiance by the dog.

‘Witness!’ said Mr. Jagger.

‘Sir,’ exclaimed a thin man in the corner, who had been subpoenaed, to his own great terror, and who at that particular moment had an idea that he was the only witness in the world—starting to his feet, under the vague impression that he was to be sworn on the spot, and thoroughly convinced that testifying and committing perjury were only different names for the same thing.

‘Not you—the man with the dog.’

Mr. Rawley looked the court full in the face.

‘Will you oblige the court by removing that animal?’ said Mr. Jagger, mildly.

‘Certingly, Sir,’ said Mr. Rawley. ‘Bitters, go home.’ Bitters rose stiffly and went out, first casting a glance at the man with a wig, for the purpose of being able to identify him on some future occasion ; and having comforted himself by a violent onslaught upon a small dog belonging to the Surrogate, whom he encountered in the entry, was seen from the window walking up the street with the most profound gravity.

This matter being disposed of, the court scratched its nose with the end of a pen, and looked impatiently at a clock which hung over the door, as much as to ask how it dared to keep a surrogate waiting. At last he said :

‘Mr. Whitman, do you know whether Mr. Fisk ever intends to come?’

‘I presume he does,’ replied Mr. Whitman. ‘It’s not time yet;’ and without further reply he went on reading, while the Surrogate looked out of the window.

A slight beckoning motion of Higgs at that moment brought Bolton to his side.

‘What’s the meaning of that fellow’s being here?’ said he, indicating, by a scarcely perceptible jerk of the head, Mr. Rawley, who sat watching Mr. Whitman with a look of mysterious import. ‘I do n’t want him here. It bodes us no good.’

‘Who is he?’ inquired the lawyer, nervously.

‘Rawley,’ replied Higgs, bluntly. ‘*He knows us.* Till within a week or two, we’ve been at his place daily. He can tell a good deal that I’d like to have kept close.’

Bolton attempted to smile, but his lip quivered and twitched.

‘Be a man! will you?’ muttered Higgs, savagely. ‘No nonsense now. If you betray *us*, you’ll have to reckon with *me*. Your lawyer’s looking at you; and you say he’s not in the plot. I believe he half suspects something wrong.’

A glance showed Bolton that although Mr. Whitman seemed engaged in perusing the paper which he held in his hand, he was in reality watching him. He muttered a few incoherent words to Higgs, and walked off with a loud laugh. As he did so, he met Mr. Fisk, who at that moment entered the office with Mr. Cutbill at his heels, carrying two law-books under his arm and a pen over his ear. Mr. Fisk glanced at Bolton, and passed on without speaking to him; and so did Mr. Cutbill. Mr. Fisk nodded to the Surrogate, who answered it by an inclination of the head; and Mr. Cutbill, being in doubt whether he might venture on the

same familiarity with a surrogate, bowed to the man with a frizzled wig. Mr. Fisk placed his hat on the table, and threw in it a bundle of papers which he had in his hand, and then nodded to Mr. Rawley. Mr. Cutbill thereupon placed *his* hat on the table; laid his two law-books by the side of it, and advanced and shook hands with Mr. Rawley sociably; and finding that Mr. Fisk had seated himself, he immediately followed his example.

‘If you are ready, gentlemen, we will proceed,’ said Mr Jagger.

‘I am ready, Sir,’ said Mr. Fisk, untying his papers and spreading them on the table. Mr. Cutbill forthwith made three pens, tore several sheets of paper in halves, and prepared to take voluminous notes. Mr. Whitman, after looking over a paper which he held in his hand, rose and said that he appeared on the part of Reuben Bolton, to ask that the last Will and testament of John Crawford, late of this city, deceased, be admitted to probate, and letters testamentary granted to him, as the executor named in it. The proper order, he said, had already been entered, on a petition heretofore made by the executor, who at that time had furnished due proof of the death of the testator. The testator, he continued, had left but one child, a daughter, surviving him; who could properly come neither under the head of heir-at-law nor next of kin, she being illegitimate. A citation had nevertheless been served on her, notifying her of the time appointed for probate of the Will; so that she might appear in court and make any opposition which she thought fit. He understood that it was her intention to resist this application of the executor; but of the position assumed by her in such opposition he was ignorant. He would proceed to prove due service of the summons, and would then produce witnesses to show the execution of the Will.

He read an affidavit, proving the service of the summons, and sat down, and after whispering a few moments with Bolton, who was seated at his elbow, called William Higgs.

It was a moment of intense anxiety to Bolton, as Higgs took his stand. He fixed a keen eye on him, as the oath was administered. But there was nothing to fear; for Higgs was a man whose nerves were of iron; and of the two, the attorney was the most agitated. Higgs seemed to be of the same opinion; for as his eye wandered around the room, it fell on that of Bolton with a look full of stern warning and menace. It was but a glance; the next instant it was gone. But the attorney understood it; and leaning his head forward, to hide his face, he pretended to be engaged in reading.

‘What’s your name?’ asked Mr. Jagger, drawing a sheet of paper to him, and dipping his pen in a large stone inkstand.

‘William Higgs,’ replied the witness.

The Surrogate wrote it down. ‘Gentlemen, proceed.’

Mr. Whitman rose, and taking the Will, unfolded it and placed it in Higgs’s hands. He then walked deliberately back to his seat, put on his spectacles, took up a pen, and prepared to make notes of the answers of the witness.

‘In whose handwriting is the second signature to the attestation clause of that Will, and by whom was it put there?’ said he.

‘It is mine, and I wrote it,’ replied Higgs.

‘On what occasion?’ asked Mr. Whitman, without raising his eyes from the paper on which he was writing.

‘At the time that the Will was signed by Mr. Crawford,’ replied Higgs, in a firm, clear voice.

‘Be good enough to state to the court the manner in

which it was executed, and how you came to attest it. Speak louder.'

Higgs paused a moment, and then stated that he together with Wilkins had gone to the office of Bolton to transact some business of their own. On arriving there, they found Mr. Crawford also there with Bolton. He was reading a paper which he afterwards informed them was his Will. When he had completed the perusal of it, he was desirous of executing it on the spot, and proposed to Wilkins and himself to become the witnesses to its execution. On their assenting, he declared it to be his last Will and testament, subscribing it in their presence, and they witnessed it in his.

'Not so fast,' interrupted Mr. Fisk, who was taking down the testimony as rapidly as his pen could fly over the paper. 'Repeat what you last said.'

Higgs did so.

'Very well; go on.'

'Were you acquainted with Mr. Crawford?' asked Mr. Whitman.

'Very slightly. I had talked with him, and knew him to be Mr. Crawford.'

'Was he present when the Will was attested?'

'He was. He held the paper open while we signed it.'

A few questions were asked as to the mental capacity of the testator, and these being satisfactorily answered, Mr. Whitman paused, leaned his head on his hand, and whispered a few words to Bolton; after which he said: 'Mr. Fisk, the witness is yours.'

Mr. Fisk paused to nib a pen, and then, with a pleasant smile on his face, and in a quiet, friendly tone, inquired:

'What's your age?'

'About forty.'

'Where do you reside?'

‘In this city,’ replied Mr. Higgs.

‘What’s your occupation?’

‘I have none at present. I’m a gentleman-at-large.’

‘A very pleasant profession,’ said Mr. Fisk, in an amiable tone. ‘When did you first begin to be a gentleman-at-large?’

‘I have always been one,’ returned Higgs, not altogether seeing the dangerous tendency of the questions, while Bolton sat upon thorns, vainly endeavoring to catch his eye.

‘I suppose you have property?’

‘I’m rather snug at present; more so than I have been. I inherited something lately.’

‘From whom?’ demanded Mr. Fisk, pausing in his writing, and looking up; though Mr. Cutbill did not for a moment suffer his pen to stop.

‘From a deceased uncle,’ replied Higgs, beginning to feel a little uneasy at the turn the examination was taking.

‘What was his name?’

Higgs hesitated, but it was only for a moment. He saw the half-triumphant smile of Fisk, and his hesitation vanished.

‘His name was the same as mine, William Higgs.’

Mr. Whitman had been busy whispering with Bolton, though he still had an ear open to the cross-examination; and although he did not see the dangerous bearing of it, owing to his ignorance of the facts which Fisk had learned, still he thought it time to check it. ‘If your Honor please,’ said he, rising, ‘I object to these questions, as altogether irrelevant. They have no bearing on the case, and only consume the time of the court and counsel, without profiting any one.’

Down he sat, and up got Mr. Fisk. ‘The counsel,’ he said, ‘was as well aware as he was of the object of these questions; and as he had no wish to let the witness see his hand,

nor to place him on his guard, he hoped that the court would permit him to continue his examination, without compelling him to state its immediate object. If in his progress he should ask any thing which the laws of evidence prohibited, of course the court would stop him ; but until he did so, he claimed the right to elicit any information from the witness which would benefit his client.'

Mr. Whitman rose and replied, and the court supported the objection, unless Mr. Fisk would state the object of the examination.

Mr. Fisk said that it was his intention to show that the witness was a man of a notoriously infamous character ; that he had led a vagabond life for many years past ; that he had never possessed, nor gained by his own industry, nor inherited, property of any description ; and that all his means of support were derived from Bolton ; furnished no doubt on the understanding that he was to lend his assistance in establishing this Will. *That*, he said, had been the object of his questions ; an object which, now that he had been compelled to mention it, he presumed it would be impossible for him to attain ; as the witness, being warned, would be careful so to frame his replies as to baffle all farther inquiries.

He sat down, dipped his pen spitefully in the inkstand, and violently assaulted a corn on Mr. Cutbill's left foot with the heel of his boot.

The Surrogate rubbed his chin, and said that he thought the party had a right to draw from the witness any facts which would tend to show what credit might be given to his testimony, but he could not allow the wide latitude which the examination was taking. Mr. Fisk continued his examination by a series of short but pertinent inquiries, which, had they been answered as he wished, would have gone far to shake the credibility of Higgs. But that gentle-

man was on his guard ; and although the skilful attorney varied his mode of attack and shifted his ground, and from time to time returned and renewed his efforts unexpectedly on various points where he thought the witness was most assailable, he was still completely baffled ; for Higgs's resources increased with his risk ; and he fabricated with a facility and ingenuity which were truly wonderful. At length Mr. Fisk turned to him, and looking him steadily in the face, demanded :

‘ Have you at any time received money from Mr. Bolton ? ’

Up got Mr. Whitman. ‘ I object,’ said he. ‘ Suppose he has received money from Mr. Bolton, what then ? He has a right to, I suppose. If the gentleman means to ask if the witness has been bribed to testify, let him put his question in that shape ; then we can understand him.’

‘ Be it so,’ said Mr. Fisk. ‘ Did you receive a check from Mr. Bolton recently ? ’

‘ No ! ’ replied Higgs, bluntly.

‘ Are you positive ? ’

‘ I am.’

‘ What is that ? ’ asked Mr. Fisk, extending toward him a paid check, the very one which Bolton had given him, and which he had got cashed at the bank. ‘ Have you ever seen that before ? ’

‘ I have,’ replied Higgs, with unruffled composure.

‘ Did you get the money for it ? ’

‘ I did,’ said he, without looking at Bolton, who sat with a blanched face, and the perspiration standing on his forehead. ‘ I was going to the lower part of the city ; Mr. Bolton wanted some money, and asked me as I passed the bank to get the check cashed for him. I did so, and handed the money to him.’

Bolton drew a long breath, like a man suddenly relieved

from some great pressure, as Higgs gave this plausible reply.

Fisk cross-examined him severely ; but he drew nothing from him. He then took up the cross-examination as to the Will.

‘ Were you present at the execution of that Will ? ’ inquired he.

‘ I was.’

‘ Who signed it ? ’

‘ Mr. Crawford, the testator.’

‘ When was it ? ’

‘ Sometime in the month of September last. I do n’t recollect the day.’

Mr. Fisk’s countenance fell, and Mr. Cutbill looked absolutely miserable.

‘ Are you sure that it was in September ? ’ asked Fisk, going on with his notes ; although it was a moment of intense anxiety.

‘ I am.’

Fisk rose and took the Will from the witness.

‘ The Will is dated August 10th, and purports to be executed on that day,’ said he, handing it to the Surrogate. ‘ Here’s a strange discrepancy between the date and execution.’

‘ How do you account for that, Sir ? ’ said Mr. Jagger, looking very profoundly at him.

‘ I do n’t pretend to account for it,’ replied Higgs. ‘ All I know is, that I put my signature to that paper at the request of Mr. Crawford, and it must have been in September ; for Mr. Wilkins and myself were both absent from the city during the month of August, and did not return until September. It was shortly after our return. I think within a week. I can’t swear to the day of the month ; but it was

from the fifth to the tenth of September. If that Will states that we witnessed it in August, it's wrong.'

There was a look of triumph on the face of Bolton when Fisk, after a long and fruitless cross-examination, told the witness that he might go. Mr. Whitman then called George Wilkins.

His testimony was substantially the same as that of Higgs. He was blunt and even savage in his manner ; but his testimony was direct and clear ; and when examined as to the date of the execution of the Will, he swore positively that it was on the fifth or sixth of September, he did not recollect which ; but that he was sure it was one or the other. He was present ; knew Mr. Crawford, and saw him sign the paper. It was in Bolton's office. He also swore to the capacity of the testator.

' We have done with the witness,' said Whitman, leaning back in his chair.

Again Fisk tried cross-examining ; but at last he threw down his pen, having exhausted every effort to impair his testimony, without success. He felt that the day was against him. His manner was unconstrained ; his smile pleasant ; but both of the lawyers opposed to him were too well acquainted with him not to be satisfied that he was greatly disappointed, as he dismissed the witness.

Probate of the Will was then requested ; but Mr. Fisk mentioned that it was his intention to produce witnesses on the part of the heir-at-law, and the Surrogate declined giving a decision until they had been heard.

The whole morning had been consumed in the examination of Higgs and Wilkins, and in skirmishes between the lawyers as to points of law and the admissibility of evidence, the detail of which has been in a great measure omitted. As soon as they had got through, Mr. Jagger drew out a large

watch, looked at the hour, compared it with the clock over the door, held it to his ear, adjourned the court for two hours, and without the loss of time jumped up, put on his hat, and walked directly out of the office, looking neither to the right nor left, and speaking to no one.

His example was followed by the others, who gradually dropped off, until the man in the frizzled wig, who was quietly slumbering behind his spectacles, with his pen in his hand, and a large blot on the page to mark the spot where he had intermitted his labors, was the sole occupant of the office.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE interval of adjournment was passed by the attorney and his two confederates in Bolton's office. The long-legged clerk was sent off on some unimportant errand, to get him out of the way; for many matters were to be discussed which the attorney thought it wise to keep from his ears.

The haggard, unnatural look which during the early part of the day had pinched his face almost out of human semblance was succeeded by one of high excitement; for the trial thus far had gone off well; and he was proportionably sanguine. Higgs seemed to participate in his feelings, and gave vent to a variety of demonstrations of satisfaction which were peculiar to himself; such as throwing his hat with great violence across the room; waving his hands in divers hitherto unheard-of and fantastic manners, and whistling with tremendous force. But Wilkins, from the time that he had delivered his testimony, had become moody and sullen, taking no share in the conversation, and scarcely deigning to answer when spoken to.

'We managed it well,' said the attorney, rubbing his hands together with an appearance of keen satisfaction. 'We shall beat them. Fisk has given up. His looks show it.'

Wilkins raised his eyes from the floor, which he had been contemplating, and said in a gloomy tone: 'You'll gain your end; and to help you do it, I've damned myself, body and soul. I'll never hold up my head again. It is the first time I ever committed perjury.'

Higgs placed his hand on his shoulder, and said: 'Pshaw!

George, don't be a woman. Think of the twenty thousand.'

'I *do* think of it,' answered the wretched man; 'and I would count down every dollar of it on this very spot, to the man that could make me even the miserable outcast that I was before I crossed the threshold of that office. I sha' n't go there again. The air of that blasted room chokes me; and when I think of the curse that I have drawn down upon myself, and see those big books on the shelves about its walls, and know that on each leaf of them is written the last wishes of a man who was once living like myself, but has gone to his last account, it makes me shudder. I can't go there again. It's torture. I won't!—I *swear* I won't! I'll keep *that* oath, though I have broken another.'

'Well, George, I did not expect this from you,' said Higgs, taking his hand. 'Why, who used to be the wildest and most daring of our set? Who led us on when there was mischief in the wind? Who always cheered the faint-hearted and encouraged the hot-headed? Who but you? My dear fellow, don't give up now! All looks fair. Don't it, Bolton?'

'Fairer than we could hope,' replied the lawyer. 'We must win. You are safe; nor is it necessary that you should go to the Surrogate's office again. But don't lose heart.'

Wilkins shook his head. 'I do n't know how it is,' said he, 'but I am as frightened as a child to-day. I feel as if some great evil was hanging over me; and I think that at times I can see its shadow; but I look up, and nothing is there but the blue sky. I know that it's all fancy—a kind of dream; and I try to shake it off; and it leaves me for a time, but it soon comes back. I hope it's no omen of evil. I should like to live to see the twenty thousand. I've done your business,' said he to Bolton, abruptly; 'you must do

without me now ; for to gain the half of this city I would n't go into that room and swear again to what I swore this morning.'

All attempts to change his resolution were fruitless : and the hour to which the court had adjourned being nigh at hand, they left him, and once more directed their steps to the Surrogate's office.

When they arrived there, the room was filled with witnesses, and with those whose curiosity had led them thither. Among the last, in a conspicuous position, sat Mr. Quagley, with the stunted marker at his side. Presently the Surrogate came in, hung his hat on a peg, and took his seat. In a few moments Mr. Cutbill led in Mrs. Dow, who, after courtesying nervously to every body, and growing very red in the face, sat down and smiled incessantly, as if she wished to impress it upon those present that she considered being subpoenaed as a witness one of the most agreeable things in the world.

Bolton experienced a slight feeling of trepidation as he ran his eye over the array of witnesses ; but more particularly when it fell on a man with white hair, who was sitting behind the rest, with his chin resting on his hands, which were crossed over the top of his cane, and watching those about him with deep interest. It was the old witness. Bolton felt that a supporting column of his fabric was knocked away. The proof of the legitimacy of Miss Crawford would throw a shadow of fraud upon the Will which it would be difficult to remove. Still it would be suspicion only, and the Will might be valid ; but would the court so decide ? He dared not answer his own question ; and he sat in a dream-like stupor, paying attention to nothing until Mr. Fisk rose to speak.

He stated briefly that he appeared there to contest the

instrument offered for probate, and which purported to be the last Will and testament of John Crawford, deceased, on the part of the HEIR-AT-LAW. As he said this, he turned and looked significantly at Bolton. He said that he would prove beyond a doubt the marriage of Eliza Jones to John Crawford, and the subsequent birth of a daughter, Helen Crawford, who was the party opposing the Will. He would also show to the court that the character of the witnesses to that instrument was such that they could not be believed under oath; that they were men whose very means of subsistence were obtained by crime, and to whose testimony no weight whatever could be attached. Declarations of Reuben Bolton as to the time of the execution of that paper would also be offered in evidence; declarations totally at variance with the sworn evidence of the witnesses, who by their own account attested the paper in his office and in his presence. He would also offer in evidence declarations of the testator, made shortly previous to his death, and since the time at which that Will was pretended to have been executed, that he had made a Will, naming his daughter, Helen Crawford, therein as his sole devisee; and lastly, he would show that at the very time this pretended Will was sworn to have been subscribed by the testator in the office of Bolton, Mr. Crawford was absent from the city; had been so for several weeks, and did not return until two months afterward. He cast a triumphant glance at the attorney; but Bolton had recovered his composure.

Mr. Whitman rose as Fisk sat down, and said that, as a preliminary step to his entering into this testimony, he should expect the gentleman to show his client's right to contest the Will, by showing her legitimacy, as he had promised.

'I will,' was Mr. Fisk's curt reply. He called John Hastings.

This was the old witness. He gave his evidence in a clear, straight-forward manner. He proved the marriage; gave the name of the clergyman, and of those present at the ceremony, and mentioned the place at which it was performed. The book in which it was registered by the officiating clergyman was also produced, and his hand-writing and the identity of the book were proved beyond a doubt; for the information obtained from this witness had enabled the friends of Miss Crawford to discover the name of the person who had performed the nuptial ceremony, and the proper place at which to search for the record of the marriage. Notwithstanding the opposition of Mr. Whitman, by dint of management, Mr. Fisk contrived to get admitted in evidence an account of his recent visits to the office of the attorney for the purpose of ascertaining the residence of Mr. Crawford, and of the manner in which Bolton had deceived him from time to time, and of his strange behavior on the night of his last visit to his office. His manner was so simple, yet earnest and truthful, that his evidence told terribly against Bolton. Mr. Whitman cross-examined him, and attacked and harassed him in every possible manner; but the story was still the same. There was no variation, no contradiction; and at last he was told that he might go.

As he sat down, Mr. Whitman turned furiously to Bolton, and asked in a whisper: 'What's the meaning of this, Sir? It's proved beyond a doubt. There's no doubt as to her legitimacy.'

'I can't understand it. It's *false*,' replied Bolton in a faint voice. 'Perhaps there's subornation. I suspect foul play.'

'*So do I*,' said Mr. Whitman, looking at him with a lowering eye. 'If Fisk makes out his case, there will be no doubt of the d——dest villany *somewhere* that ever was

perpetrated ; and be the perpetrator who he may, he shall pay the penalty, if there 's law in the land.' As he said this, he turned savagely away to take down the answers of the next witness, who was no other than the relict of the late Mr. Dow. Mr. Fisk led her to a chair near the Surrogate.

'What's your name?' demanded Mr. Jagger.

'Mrs. Dow — Mrs. Wiolet Dow,' replied the witness.

The Surrogate took it down, and then extended the Bible toward her.

'Put your hand on the book.'

Mrs. Dow did so.

'Are you left-handed?' inquired Mr. Jagger, gruffly.

'Oh no, Sir ; my husband was, but *I* a' n't.'

'Then put your right hand on the Bible, and listen to the oath. Stand up. You solemnly swear that the evidence which you shall give in the matter of proving the last Will and testament of John Crawford, deceased, shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God.'

'Of course it shall be, Mr. Surrogate. Of course it shall,' said Mrs. Dow, courtesying ; 'I always tell the truth.'

'Kiss the book!' interrupted Mr. Jagger, at the same time extending to her a remarkably dirty Bible, which in due form of law had submitted to the embraces of every witness whom he had sworn for the last ten years.

Mrs. Dow kissed the book ; and after a few preliminary rufflings settled herself down, and looked very earnestly at Mr. Fisk, at the same time pulling off and putting on her gloves with rather an unnecessary frequency.

'Where do you reside, Mrs. Dow?'

'In the Bowery, three doors from S — street, on the north side ; a small brick house with a yellow door.'

'No matter for that,' interrupted Mr. Fisk. 'You reside in the city?'

‘Oh yes, Sir ; I do.’

‘What’s your age ?’ inquired Mr. Fisk.

Mrs. Dow reddened, and hesitated. ‘My age, Sir—is that very material ?’

‘No. You are past twenty, are you not ?’ said Mr. Fisk.

‘I object to that question as leading,’ said Mr. Whitman, a grim smile crossing his face for the first time that day.

‘Put it yourself,’ replied Mr. Fisk, looking up from his writing.

‘I will. Are you past sixty or seventy, Madam ?’

‘Seventy ! gracious me !’ exclaimed Mrs. Dow, extremely agitated.

Here the mirth of the stunted marker, who had been watching the trial with great interest, became exceedingly uproarious, and was cut short by Mr. Quagley, who quietly applied his knuckles in a single hard knock to the top of his head.

Mr. Jagger looked sternly at the stunted marker, and said something about committing him, but altered his mind, and scratching his nose with his little finger, told Mr. Fisk to proceed.

‘You need not answer the question,’ said Mr. Fisk. ‘It’s unimportant, and I withdraw it. Are you acquainted with a man by the name of George Wilkins ?’

‘Oh yes, Sir, I think I am—I ought to be.’ And Mrs. Dow looked as if she could say a great deal more if it were necessary.

‘Then you are acquainted with him ?’ said Mr. Fisk.

‘Oh yes, Sir, quite acquainted.’

‘Did he ever make to you a proposal of marriage ?’

Mrs. Dow became overwhelmed with confusion. Mr. Fisk repeated the question ; and amid various flourishes of an article which had once been a handkerchief, the lady ad-

mitted that he had 'once;' and thereupon she hid her face and her blushes in the article before mentioned.

'Stop,' said Mr. Whitman.

'Did he ever write to you when he was absent from the city?' demanded Mr. Fisk, pretending not to hear the objection.

Again the handkerchief was flourished in the air, and again the lady buried her face in it, while an affirmative escaped from among its folds.

'What was the nature of those letters?'

'If your Honor please,' interrupted Mr. Whitman, gradually unfolding himself until he stood on his feet, 'I object to these questions. It appears to me that the family history of the witness has little to do with the case. Her matrimonial arrangements may be matters of deep interest to herself; but I must confess that I do not participate in that feeling; and unless the learned counsel can show some very good reason for entering upon the history of the amatory adventures of an old woman of seventy, I shall move that all further detail of the throes and agonies of her susceptible heart be excluded.'

As he sat down, no part of Mrs. Dow's face was visible except a peppery eye, which gleamed at him over one end of the handkerchief in glances of fire.

Mr. Fisk rose to reply. 'Since the gentleman is so very desirous of knowing what I intend to prove by this witness, I will tell him. The paper which he has produced in court, and which he wishes to establish as a Will of real and personal estate, *purports* to have been attested by two persons, George Wilkins and William Higgs. It is my intention, by the testimony of this witness, to show the character of the first of these two men; to prove him to be a man void of principle, who would lend himself to any transaction, however

foul, provided he found it to his interest to do so. The object of the particular questions to which the learned counsel objects is to prove that this same George Wilkins has made to this lady an offer of marriage; is in the habit of corresponding with her as his affianced wife; and is under a solemn pledge of marriage to her, while he has a wife living and residing in this city at this very time.'

'Of course such testimony is not admissible,' replied the Surrogate. 'You may bring evidence to show the general reputation of the witness for veracity, but you cannot offer isolated facts.'

But Mr. Fisk's object had been gained. He had contrived to cast suspicion on the character of Wilkins.

All further examination was for a moment suspended by a sound between a hiccough, a laugh, and a scream, emanating from Mrs. Dow; and after several violent flourishes of her arms and feet, in which latter performance there was rather an unusual display of red flannel under-clothes, Mrs. Dow fell flat on the floor, carrying with her a pile of law-books which she had unconsciously grasped in her descent, to the great annoyance of a deaf witness, who was sleeping in the corner, and whose foot formed the receptacle of one of the last-named articles.

Mrs. Dow was not a very bulky specimen of her sex, and the man with a frizzled wig, with the assistance of a far from vigorous bystander, had very little difficulty in transferring her from the room to the open air. A slight bustle was created by this occurrence; but in a few minutes it being announced that the lady was reviving, Mr. Fisk said that he would trouble her no further, as he could prove all that was necessary by other witnesses, whose nerves were less sensitive.

It is scarcely necessary to trace him through the gradual

development of his case. Witness after witness was produced. The character of both Higgs and Wilkins was painted in its true light; vilest even where all were vile, callous, hardened, and reckless. Even Higgs, indifferent as he usually was to the opinion of those about him, slunk into a corner away from the eye of the crowd, and leaned down his head so that none could see his face. Bolton still sat where he had stationed himself at the beginning of the cause; but his face, usually so pale, became flushed. He dared not look at his own lawyer; for he felt that every now and then the piercing eyes of Mr. Whitman were flashing on him in glances of fire, and that while he was laboring to the utmost in his cause, his mind was filled with suspicion.

‘A d——d pretty pair of witnesses you had to that Will!’ said he at last, in a snappish whisper.

‘I never vouched for their character,’ replied Bolton, with apparent coolness. ‘You know how they happened to witness it. A man has all sorts of men among his clients.’

‘I do not, Sir, when I find them out,’ replied Mr. Whitman, sharply.

He turned his back on Bolton, and Mr. Fisk went on with his case. A witness was produced to prove assertions of Bolton that the Will had been executed on the tenth of August. On the cross-examination, however, he became confused, and eventually contradicted all that he had said in his direct examination; and when he got out of Mr. Whitman’s hands, his testimony amounted to nothing. Still Fisk produced witness after witness; some proving one thing, some another, but all materially strengthening his case. With the exception just mentioned, the case looked unfavorable to the attorney. Persons of unimpeachable character swore to declarations made by the testator subsequent to the time at which the forged Will was sworn to have been

executed, that he had left all his property to his daughter. Cross-examination had no effect on their testimony. The facts remained the same; uncontradicted, unshaken. Again Whitman cast a stern inquiring glance at Bolton.

‘It may be as they say,’ whispered Bolton in reply to the look; ‘but I know nothing of it. If there’s a later Will, let them produce it. Until they *do*, this one is the *last*, and stands.’

Again Whitman turned away, baffled in his suspicions, and again the attorney felt himself relieved as that stern, searching eye was removed from his face.

There was a great deal of quiet confidence in the manner of Fisk, as he called his last witness. As he did so, he whispered a few words in the ear of Mr. Cutbill, who laughed convulsively. The witness had been an upper-servant in the house of Mr. Crawford. He swore that Mr. Crawford went into the country in the month of August, and was absent until late in the month of November following; that he lived with Mr. Crawford at the time, and knew when he left the city and when he returned. All went on smoothly during the direct examination. Fisk grew very confident, the Surrogate frowned at Bolton, and Mr. Cutbill laid down his pen, and in the excess of his delight cracked the knuckles of ten fingers at once.

‘The witness is yours, Mr. Whitman.’

Before commencing the cross-examination, a long and earnest conversation was carried on in an undertone between Bolton and Whitman, who turned to the witness and asked:

‘At what time in the month of August last did Mr. Crawford leave the city?’

‘About the fifteenth,’ replied the man.

‘How long was he absent?’

‘Until the end of the month of November following.’

‘You are certain?’

The witness answered in the affirmative.

‘Did he not at any time return to the city between the fifteenth of August and the end of November?’

‘I think not. I’m positive that he did not.’

Mr. Fisk here whispered something to Mr. Cutbill, who laughed in a subdued but violent manner. Mr. Whitman looked up at them; and there was a smile on his face which Fisk did not relish.

‘Were you in the habit of carrying letters from Mr. Crawford to Mr. Bolton’s office?’

‘I was, frequently.’

‘Do you recollect on one occasion taking a note to him containing a large sum of money, which you dropped in the outer entry?’

‘I do,’ replied the witness.

‘What has that to do with the matter?’ interrupted Mr. Fisk.

‘You’ll see,’ replied Mr. Whitman, grimly. ‘Who gave you that letter?’

‘Mr. Crawford.’

‘Where was he when he gave it to you?’

‘At his own house.’

‘Did he send any message with the letter?’

‘He told me to tell Mr. Bolton that he would call at his office in an hour, and that he particularly wished him not to go out till he came.’

‘Did he state to you the nature of the business which he expected to transact with Mr. Bolton?’

‘He did not.’

‘Do you recollect whether you mentioned to Mr. Bolton what you supposed the nature of that business to be?’

‘I object to that,’ interrupted Mr. Fisk, sharply. ‘We

do n't want to hear the suppositions of the witness. He will please to confine himself to what he knows.'

'You shall have it, Sir,' replied Mr. Whitman, in a very curt manner. Then turning to the witness, he said, 'State what you repeated to Mr. Bolton in obeying the instructions of Mr. Crawford.'

'I told him that Mr. Crawford wanted to see him about his Will.'

'Did Mr. Crawford tell you to do so?' interrupted Mr. Fisk, sharply.

'No, Sir.'

'Ah! I see: it was only a surmise of your own,' said Mr. Fisk, leaning back in his chair.

'I would suggest to the gentleman,' said Mr. Whitman, snappishly, 'that the time for him to commence his cross-examination is after I get through.'

Mr. Fisk made no reply, but looked abstractedly up at the ceiling.

Mr. Whitman turned to the witness.

'How did you know that Mr. Crawford wanted to see Mr. Bolton about his Will?'

'Because, while Mr. Crawford was speaking to me and giving me directions to go to Mr. Bolton's office, there was a paper lying folded up on the table near him; and on it was written in large letters, that it was Mr. Crawford's Will; and before I left the room he put in it his pocket.'

Mr. Whitman got up, handed him the forged Will, and showed him the endorsement on it. 'Was that the paper?' said he.

The witness examined it carefully, and said that he did not know. It certainly *looked* very like it. It was folded in that way, and the writing on the back of it was in the same hand. He did not know. He thought it was, but he could not swear to it.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Whitman, laying down his pen and looking the witness full in the face, ‘*when was that?*’

The man stood for some time, running the matter over in his mind; then he grew exceedingly red, hesitated and stammered, and at last said, he recollected that it was in the month of September last; he had forgotten it, when he answered at first; he had intended to tell the truth — indeed he had.

‘Do n’t be frightened, my good fellow,’ said Mr. Whitman, soothingly. ‘I have no doubt of it; and the object of my asking those previous questions was to recall it to your recollection. Now try if you can tell me what was the day of the month.’

The witness paused, and at last swore positively that it was the sixth of September. He knew it because his wages had become due on that day, and Mr. Crawford had paid them before going out of town, which he did the same afternoon. He mentioned a number of other reasons for his being certain as to the day. He was positive as to the date. A few more questions were asked; and Mr. Whitman told him that he was done with him.

It was in vain that Mr. Fisk endeavored to alter his testimony, by renewing his direct examination. The fact, luckily for Bolton, was as the witness had sworn; and Fisk dismissed the man with the strong conviction that the tide was against him.

‘Have you any more witnesses, gentlemen?’ asked the Surrogate.

‘None!’ replied Mr. Fisk.

‘Have you any more testimony to offer?’ said he, turning to Mr. Whitman.

Mr. Whitman replied in the negative.

‘If you have any remarks to make before submitting this

matter to the decision of the court, I will hear them.' Mr. Jagger thrust his thumbs in his waist-coat pockets, and frowned at the opposite wall, by way of showing that he was preparing to listen intently; and Mr. Fisk, after running his eye over his notes, got up. In his speech he contended that the discrepancy between the date of the Will and the time when it was proved to have been executed; the notoriously bad character of the attesting witnesses; the ample proof of the legitimacy of Miss Crawford, and the declarations of the testator as to the disposition which he had made of his property, were facts too overwhelming to be withstood, and proved that the Will was a fraudulent one, beyond even a shadow of doubt. He supported his position by powerful and plausible argument. He cited cases; read extracts from some, and called the attention of the Surrogate to others, which went to strengthen those previously read. His speech, which lasted more than two hours, was able, vigorous, and exceedingly bitter, sparing neither Bolton nor his confederates.

Mr. Whitman was one of those men who take a long time to get started; and it was not until he had spoken for fifteen or twenty minutes, that his strength began to show itself. He said that the facts relating to the date of the Will, which appeared so very mysterious to the opposite counsel, were simply these. The testator had caused his Will to be drawn up, had intended to have executed it on the tenth of August, and had inserted the date in his own hand-writing on that day. For some reason he had neglected to execute it, and went from the city, leaving the Will incomplete. In the month of September he returned for the purpose of attending to other business; and while in the city, thought of his Will, and that it had not been executed. He sent word to the lawyer to wait until he came to his office—as was proved

by the testimony of one of their own witnesses, on whom therefore there could rest no suspicion of bias in favor of his client — at the same time taking his Will with him. He went to the office of Mr. Bolton, and executed it. He had no time to spare, as he intended leaving town by the boat which was to start in the afternoon. Higgs and Wilkins, whom he knew from having frequently met them in the lawyer's office, and who also knew him in the same manner, happened to be there at the time; and he requested them to attest the Will. They did so. The Will was left with Bolton, and in an hour Mr. Crawford was on his way up the Hudson. This, he said, was the solution of this very profound mystery. To his declarations that he had left a Will in favor of his daughter, he had nothing to say. If there was one, on its being produced this Will would be a mere dead-letter; but until it *was* produced, this Will stood. The gentleman, he said, laid great stress on his calling his daughter illegitimate in his Will, when she was not so; and on that ground declared the present Will to be forged. He believed it was not the first time that people had made misrepresentations in their Wills when they wished to justify any act which they supposed that the world would censure, which Wills nevertheless had stood. It might be a ground for attacking the mental capacity of the testator; but it was the first time in the whole course of his experience that he ever had heard that because a testator in making his Will had misrepresented a fact, that therefore the Will was a forged one. The evidence of his opponent was pulled to pieces, while the facts in his own case were presented in the most favorable point of view, and the law bearing on them was applied in the most masterly manner. Nothing could be more clear, forcible, and apparently conclusive than his argument; and when he sat down, although Mr. Jagger looked

as earnestly as ever at the opposite wall, and seemed perfectly impervious to speeches of all kinds, the feelings of the less experienced of the audience were with Bolton.

The two counsel gathered up their papers; and Mr. Jagger said that he would examine the case, and give his decision as soon as possible. He then adjourned the court.

‘What’s the meaning of what that last fellow swore to about the Will?’ said Higgs to the attorney, as soon as they were out of the building. ‘Was he bought?’

‘No; what he said was true,’ replied Bolton. ‘Crawford did come to my office on that day, and he *did* bring a Will; but he never executed it. He wanted to consult me about it, suggested some alterations, and went out of town, leaving it in my possession until his return. I have it in my office now. It was a lucky coincidence with what you and Wilkins swore to. I had forgotten it. It flashed across me as soon as Fisk called the fellow; and I happened to have a memorandum in my pocket-book, made by Crawford, and dated by him; so that I was sure of the time before I broke the matter to Whitman, who is as suspicious as the very Devil. He managed the fellow finely. His summing up was not bad.’

‘But those assertions of the old man, that he had made another Will?’ suggested Higgs.

‘I suppose he referred to this one. He must have forgotten that he did not execute it. He left every thing to *her* in it.’

‘You’ll gain the cause,’ said Higgs, quietly. ‘When will you be ready to plank up? You’ll not hang fire? If you *do*, you’ll be sorry for it!’

‘I’ll be ready on the very day,’ said Bolton.

‘That’s enough.’ And Higgs left him, and made the best of his way to one of his old haunts.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE day on which the Will was offered for probate was a dreadful one for Lucy; not the less so that the cause of her trouble was such that she could communicate it to no one without the risk of bringing upon the head of her husband the penalty which the law awarded to crimes such as his. Fortunately for her, Miss Crawford rarely spoke of the Will, except to Dr. Thurston and Wharton; and thus the extreme agitation which Lucy always evinced when it was alluded to escaped observation. But this rack of mind was making sad inroads upon her health. Her voice had become feeble, her step languid, and her whole form so frail and thin that she seemed but the ghost of what she had been. She grew absent and moody, and rarely spoke.

Dr. Thurston had called frequently to see her, and had prescribed a few medicines; but as he went away one morning, he met Miss Crawford in the entry, and taking her hand, said:

‘She’s going fast. Be kind to her; for she has seen much trouble—that poor girl. It’s the heart, and not the body, that’s giving way. What did you say her name was?’

‘Mrs. Wilkins. She did not mention it herself, but a person who has been once or twice to see her, calls her so.’

‘A bad name—a very bad name! I think I may conscientiously say, a d——d bad name! It’s the name of the infernal scamp who is a witness to that Will. Can she be a relative of his?’

‘It’s not very probable.’

‘No, it is not. Well, take good care of her. She’ll not trouble you long.’

The old man took a pinch of snuff, cleared his throat, which had become a little husky, and went out.

From that time Miss Crawford redoubled her kindness to Lucy. She humored her moody ways, and on that day in particular had endeavored so patiently and with so much good-humor to cheer her spirits, that, unable to control her feelings, Lucy left the room, and going to her own chamber, wept like a child.

How guilty she felt! At that moment a strong inclination seized her to steal out of the house; to turn her back upon it, and to return no more. Then came a sudden impulse to go to Miss Crawford, and to tell her all that she knew. She rose up with this determination strong within her; but she paused. She was going to betray her husband! — one whom she still loved; to brand his name with infamy; and even though he escaped punishment, to cast a stain upon him that could never be effaced. Oh! no, no! she could not do it! — she could not!

She sat down, and endeavored to await the result of the trial with calmness; but it was an idle hope; for during the whole day her brain teemed with bewildering thoughts. At times she could dream of little else except Wilkins — an outcast, suffering the penalty of the law. Sometimes, however, her mind strayed off even from that; and a sense of utter loneliness and weariness would come over her, and a strong desire to lay her head down and never to awake again. Then again she found herself devising plans for gaining a livelihood when she should have quitted Miss Crawford’s house; for she resolved no longer to owe her bread to one whom her husband had so deeply injured. She

made up her mind that when she next saw Phillips she would communicate her intention to him, and ask his assistance; for he knew more of her secret than any one else; and she felt sure that he would appreciate the motives which induced her to abandon her present home. She had seen him but once since the memorable day of her interview with Bolton; but he had promised to attend at the Surrogate's office when the Will was offered for probate, and to inform her of what took place. Every time the bell rung she expected him; and at last a servant knocked at the door and informed her that he was below.

She got up, and as she did so she became deadly faint; but the feeling passed off. She went down stairs slowly and painfully, tottering at every step, and when she entered the room she panted for breath.

'Good Heavens, Lucy! how ill you look!' said Phillips; 'you must take care of yourself; indeed you must.'

'Never mind about that, Jack,' said she, sinking in a chair; 'never mind about that now. Tell me what has been done to-day about *him*. Has he been there?'

'He has,' replied Phillips.

Lucy closed her eyes and became exceedingly pale. 'Well, go on; I can bear any thing now; go on. Let me know the worst at once. He swore that he saw the Will signed?'

'Yes, he did,' said Phillips.

'When? — when? Tell me that!'

'Some time in September. The sixth or seventh.'

Lucy started to her feet. 'September! September! Did he say September?' exclaimed she vehemently, at the same time grasping his arm.

'There was some difficulty about that,' replied Phillips. 'As well as I could make it out, the Will was dated in August; but was not witnessed then. Both Higgs and

Wilkins swore to that. It could not have been; for they said that they were both absent from the city in August. The lawyers talked a great deal about it; and I do n't know how it would have ended; but one of Miss Crawford's own witnesses — a servant who had lived in the house — swore that he took the Will to Bolton's office on the very day that these men swore that they witnessed it there; and that his master went there to sign it. It was the sixth or seventh of September.'

Lucy clasped her hands together. 'Thank God! Thank God! Poor George! I have wronged him. I have wronged him!'

But amid this sudden gush of joy, she recollected her interview with the attorney, and the violent agitation which he had then displayed; and the truth flashed on her. This was some new trick of his. She had put him on his guard; and he had thus been enabled to provide against detection, which would otherwise have been certain.

'I see it all; I see it all!' said she, again sinking back in her chair. 'It's all written too plainly to be mis-read. I can trace all the windings of that man's black heart. God help those who fall in his hands! God help George now; for he's lost for ever!'

She leaned her head on her hands, and the tears gushed from between her fingers.

'But, Lucy,' interposed Phillips, in an expostulating voice, 'all seems straight-forward about this matter. If there's any foul play, it's on the part of the old man. It was shameful for him to cut off his daughter in that way; but there's no blame to George.'

'You do n't know all, Jack; you do n't know what passed between the lawyer and me when I went to his office. It almost turned my head; but it's past now. We won't talk

of this matter any longer,' said she, with a sudden effort. 'It can do no good. But I want you to assist and advise me in what I am going to do. I intend to leave this house, for I can't stay here after what George has done. The young lady does not know that I am his wife; but if she discovered it, I feel as if it would kill me. What I want is this: you must find me some employment, by which I can support myself without living on her charity. I care not how hard the work is. I'll labor from morning till night, sooner than be dependent on her. I know that I am doing a great wrong in not appearing at this trial, and proving that Will to be a forgery; and night and morning I pray to God to forgive me; but I cannot turn against George — now, when he has none to stand by him. No! no!'

'You are indeed doing a great wrong, Lucy,' said Phillips, 'if you know this Will to be a fraudulent one, and do not expose the fraud, come what may.'

'I know it, Jack—I know it. You cannot think me more criminal than I think myself. Remorse and anxiety have made sad work here,' said she, pressing her hand on her heart; 'yet I would suffer ten times what I have, to screen him from detection. Could the guilt and punishment fall on me, I would not hesitate one moment to speak all that I know and all that I suspect. Jack,' said she, suspiciously, 'you will not betray what I am telling you?'

'No, no! but do n't tell me any thing more, for I begin to feel guilty already.'

'Well, well, I will not,' said she; 'but you will assist me to find some means of gaining an honest living? I would not trouble you; but I am not strong enough to go abroad and seek them myself.'

Phillips took her hand in his, and spread the thin white fingers on his own large palm. 'Lucy,' said he, 'look at

these fingers. What can they do? They have scarcely strength enough to crush a straw, and are as hot as fire; and each one throbs as if there were a pulse in it; and yet you talk of work! *Work*, indeed! Do n't think of it; but take care of yourself; and if you will not stay here, go and seek a home elsewhere, and I will pay for it. When you get strong and well, you can return the loan. Do n't be afraid that I will trouble you; for from the time that you leave this house I'll not see you again unless you want assistance. Even George, jealous as he is, can find no fault with that. If he will not take care of you himself, he has no right to blame those who would offer you a shelter. If I see him, he shall have a piece of my mind.'

'Stop, Jack!' said Lucy, placing her hand on his arm; 'George has already enough to drive him mad. Do n't goad him farther. He's sorry for all that he has done—I'm sure of it. You'll do what I asked, won't you?'

'Yes, yes; but do n't be hasty,' said Phillips.

'Thank you, Jack. You must go now; for I am very feeble, and it takes but little to weary me.'

'But what answer do you make to my offer?'

'None, none—none. I'll think of it. The time may come when I may be less able to work; so ill that I must be a burden to some one. Until then I can give you no answer.'

Phillips looked at her wasted face, and those features, which were already becoming pinched and sharp, and those bright glowing eyes; and he answered in a sad tone: 'Well, Lucy, if you do n't come till then, God grant that you may not call on me soon! but you'll always find me ready. Good-bye! God bless you!'

'Stop, Phillips!' said she, as he was turning to go, and speaking in a very low tone; 'one word. If any thing

should happen, and I should not see you again, and you should hear that I am dead, and should see George, tell him that I thought of him, and forgave him all that had passed between us ; and that I had no hard thoughts of him.'

'Do n't talk so, Lucy,' said Phillips, compressing his lips ; for he was beginning to feel a strange sensation about the throat. 'Do n't—why should you ? You seem very ill, certainly, but not so bad as that. You may get well yet ; only you must not talk of working, that's all. You're young. It's only trouble, Lucy, that's killing you.'

Lucy shook her head.

'I do n't know, Jack ; I have never been right since I saw the lawyer. Something gave way *here* then,' said she, placing her hand over her heart ; 'but no matter. Tell *him* that I loved him to the last ; and that my last thought was of him. Perhaps, when I'm out of his way, he will think kindly of me. Good-bye !'

She reached out her hand to him, and he took it, and pressed the wasted fingers. "Good-bye ! Lucy, good-bye. I'll see you again. I'll come to-morrow. You seem faint now ; but perhaps you'll be better then.'

'Perhaps so ; perhaps so.'

Phillips rubbed his hand across his eyes and went out.

Lucy leaned her head back, and from the window she had a distant view of the river and fields of the opposite shore. Although it was winter, it was a soft glowing day, and the air played freely through the open window. It seemed purer and more refreshing than she had ever felt it before. How charming the landscape was ! Far-distant objects loomed up until she fancied that she could touch them ; and yet every thing was very beautiful. Oh ! how rich and blue and unfathomable was that deep sky ! Did she dream ?—or were there bright shadows fitting in the sun-beams, and

glad faces smiling kindly upon her, and the soft eyes of her mother looking mildly in hers, and voices of friends long forgotten whispering in her ears, and their loved forms hovering about her, and filling that poor heart with joy and gladness, such as it had never known since she was a child ? She knew not, she thought not. The past seemed receding. Her troubles grew more and more distant ; they faded from her mind like things dreamed of long ago, and indistinctly caught up in snatches by memory ; and then they vanished altogether, and her eyes closed.

The sun shone brightly over her pale face, and the western wind dallied with her hair. The breeze died away, the sun sank, and the pale moon-light played through the room, and the air grew damp and heavy with the dews of night. Hour after hour passed. The moon disappeared, and the room became dark. Still Lucy awoke not. Light and darkness were the same to her now ; for the poor broken heart was still for ever. Her sorrows and troubles were over ; and Wilkins had lost — what he was never again destined to find — one who loved him more than life.

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THERE was a country church, far away from the gloomy walls of the city, and buried in trees ; and close by it was a quiet, shadowy grave-yard, filled with tall, solemn elms, and old willows, with their long limbs drooping down to the grass and brushing the tomb-stones. Lucy had often lain under them when a child, and watched the birds playing in the branches, and listened to the wind as it whispered through the leaves ; and she thought that there were voices speaking to her, and she had answered them ; and she had talked to the birds as they flew from twig to twig ; and they seemed to understand her, to peep inquisitively down, but never to fear her. Poor Lucy ! it was her play-ground then, and of late she

had often looked to it as her place of rest. She had been very happy there once, and she fancied that it would be more peaceful than any other spot on earth. In that quiet old church-yard, where the bright sun could shine upon her grave, and the flowers blossom in the spring, and where there was nothing to shut out the blue sky, except the waving boughs of the old trees that she had loved—there they buried her. Not far off was her native village, a small sequestered place, where she had passed the brightest part of her life. Many a bright-eyed girl stole away from her home in that little town to see the burial. They were those who had played with her in days long past; and they lingered about the grave as if sad to part with an old friend, from whom they had been so long separated. ‘Poor thing!’ said a gray-haired old man: ‘I knew her when she was a laughing little creature, almost a baby; she played here often. She was a merry, light-hearted girl then; I hope she was always so. She was very young to die; very young. I hope she had a happy life!’ He turned away, patted on the head a child who stood by him, and sauntered off to his own home.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Two days after the trial before the Surrogate, Higgs walked abruptly into the attorney's office. His face had not the look of cheerful indifference which usually marked it. His brow was knit, and his mouth pinched up, as if thoughts not of the most agreeable character were forcing themselves upon him.

'I'm glad you're in,' said he, going up to the chair in which Bolton was bending over some law-papers. 'Have you got a decision yet about the Will?'

Bolton shook his head.

'Well, I did n't come about that. I came to tell you of Wilkins.'

The attorney laid down a pen which he held in his hand, and with which he had been making memoranda, and looked nervously at Higgs; for there was something in his face which struck him as unusual, and every thing alarmed him now.

'Why do you stop? What of him?' demanded he.

'You've used him up,' replied Higgs. 'He's on his back, raving mad. They say he'll die.'

The attorney started up, and involuntarily clasped his hands. 'Well, go on. Where is he, and what do you want?'

'The place he's in is no place for a living man to be in. He must be moved,' said Higgs. 'It is n't even fit for a dog to die in. I want you to see to him.'

‘What ails him?’ demanded the attorney. ‘Tell me more about him. What is the matter?’

‘You know how he was the day we had that little matter of yours on hand. He grew worse and worse; and that night he talked odd, and muttered to himself; and his hands were as hot as fire. The next day he was down; and that night he was stark mad. He talked so, that it made even *my* hair stand on end.’

‘What does he speak about?’

‘Sometimes of his wife, and sometimes of you, and sometimes of the Will. It’s what’s on his mind that’s killing him. I’m afraid he can’t stand it long. You must do something for him. He’s done a good deal for you,’ said Higgs, in a sullen tone.

‘Yes, yes, I will. I’ll see him to-night,’ said Bolton, hurriedly. ‘He shall be well cared for.’

‘That alone is n’t enough. You must do more,’ said Higgs. ‘I told you that he was out of his head; and when the fever is on him, his tongue wags wildly; and he talks of what would blast us all, root and branch.’

‘Ha!’

‘I’ve watched with him till I’m worn out. You must take your turn. He’s in his senses now, and will be till the fever comes on. When will you come?’

‘To-night. Where shall I find him?’

Higgs took a pen and scrawled the address on a piece of paper.

‘Who lives in the house beside him?’ inquired the lawyer, reading the address.

‘None but the rats. Even thieves keep clear of it, for fear it will fall on ’em. I hate to go in the door. He has been there ever since he drove his wife out of doors. He

has a doctor who comes at night. I never leave them alone together. I can't be there to-night, so you must.'

'Yes, yes, I must indeed,' muttered Bolton. 'He must be watched closely. If he dies, he must leave no sign—nothing that can implicate us. Does he know that he'll die?'

Higgs shook his head. 'I would n't tell him, for fear he'd grow penitent, and let out what is best known only to ourselves. He's not what he used to be. A year ago he would have died without flinching; but he's a child now. He's touched *here*, I think,' said he, tapping his forehead. 'I wish he had n't a finger in this pie of ours—that's all. He's not the man for it.'

'I wish so, too, with all my heart,' said Bolton.

Higgs turned to the door. 'You'll let me know when you hear from the Surrogate?'

'Yes, I will.'

Higgs gave a nod, intended partly as an expression of leave-taking, and partly to settle his hat on his head, and went out, slamming the door after him.

No sooner had the sound of his steps died away than Bolton burst out into a loud, mocking laugh:

'Let him die! so his secret dies with him! One less to fear—to bribe and cringe and truckle to. Let him die! Would to God that I could find him stiff and stark when I go there! *Then* I would have only one to watch. William Higgs, I would have only *you*! Well, well; I'll go there, and when there, I'll see what must be done.' And the attorney sat down, and went on with his writing as calmly as before.

It was late at night when Bolton sought the sick man's house. The air was raw and chilly, and the wind swept in

low and hollow murmurs among the dilapidated walls. Mounting a narrow stair-case, which creaked and trembled beneath his tread, and passing along a dark entry, he opened a door, and found himself in a room separated only by a frail sash-door from that occupied by the person whom he sought. Stretched on a dirty mat, and scarcely covered by the rags which served as bed-clothes, there he lay; his eyes glassy, his cheeks fallen, his jaws prominent, and lips shrunken, showing teeth like fangs. The thin, long fingers which clutched the ragged coverlet more closely about him were like talons. As soon as he saw Bolton, he drew up the bed-clothes and turned his back toward him, at the same time asking:

‘Well, what do you want?’

‘I am come to see how you are, and to ask if you want any thing. Has the doctor been here?’

‘Yes, he has. What does he say about me? Will I get over this?’ asked Wilkins, raising himself on his elbow, and looking the lawyer sharply in the face. ‘None of your lying! Tell me truth. Will I get well, I say?’

‘Yes, yes, Wilkins,’ said the lawyer, in a hesitating tone; ‘to be sure you will. In a week you’ll be quite strong.’

‘Will I?’ said Wilkins, sinking back exhausted. ‘Well, I’m d——d weak now.’

‘Oh, that won’t last! In a few days you’ll be well; and in a fortnight, ready to go on with that divorce-suit to get rid of your wife.’

A sharp twitch, as of a sudden pain, shot across Wilkins’s face at the mention of his wife. ‘Curse it! man, can’t you talk of something more agreeable? One do n’t always want to hear of *her*. If I had not driven her off like a dog, I’d not been lying here without a soul to give me a drink when

I'm half mad with thirst. God only knows where she is! I haven't heard of her since the night that I met her in the street. Do n't talk of her!'

'Well, then, of the widow. What Fisk said at the trial can be explained away, you know.'

'Nor of *her* now. Wait till I'm on my legs.'

'Well. Will you hear of *my* plans? — of the Will? We managed that gloriously! You haven't peached?'

'No, I have n't; but it hangs like lead *here*,' said he, thumping his hand against his head; 'here, *here*, HERE! And at times, when I'm crazy with pain and fever, I have strange images whirling and dancing and twisting about me; and oftenest of all comes that old man Crawford, and his daughter. I'm afraid I've said things that I should not; for I've caught that doctor looking at me as frightened as if I were the Devil himself; and if I get mad again, I'm afraid I'll say more.'

The pale face of the attorney grew several shades paler; and he drew his breath quick and short; and his hands shook as he said, 'God! Wilkins, you have n't blabbed? You swore—you remember that oath?'

'So I do; and when I'm in my senses I'll never blow you; but when my head's turned and my mind gone, I'm not answerable for my words. If I blow you then, I can't help it.'

'*Indeed!*' exclaimed the attorney. He clenched his fingers together until the blood nearly started from his nails. 'When does the doctor come?' asked he, in a voice scarcely articulate.

'It's time now, I should think. He generally comes when the church-clock at the corner strikes nine. It's almost that now.' While he was speaking, a heavy step

was heard in the passage; and the door opened and the physician entered. He was a short, stout man, with broad shoulders and keen black eyes.

As he came in, he cast a hasty glance at the attorney; and without speaking, went directly to the sick man and took his hand.

Wilkins watched him. 'Well, Doctor, how do you find me?'

The doctor made no reply, but beckoning the attorney to follow him, went into the next room and shut the door.

'You're acquainted with this man?' asked he.

'I am,' replied Bolton. 'How is he?'

'He'll die—nothing can save him!' replied the physician, gnawing on the end of a whip which he held in his hand. 'But that's not all. He's had a hand in some devil's mischief which I'd like to sift before he goes. When he's in his senses, he is close-mouthed enough; but in his crazy fits he has let out things that have made me start. If he sees to-morrow's sun, I'll be here. At that time he's worst, and I'll learn what I can. He may die before that, and he may last some time yet; it's quite uncertain.'

'Open that door!' shouted Wilkins from the next room. 'What are you whispering about? I am not going to die, am I?' said he, half sitting up in bed, as his request was complied with, and glaring at the attorney with eyes that made his flesh creep: 'Am I going to die, I say? Why do n't you answer me, instead of standing shivering there, with your teeth chattering as if you were frightened to death? Will I get well?' exclaimed he, turning to the doctor.

'Not if you go on in that way. Lie down and compose yourself, and we can judge better to-morrow.'

'Because you'll find me dead! *That's* what you mean,'

said Wilkins, with a ghastly grin which made them shudder. 'Get away, both of you—both of you! Curse you both! You would murder me. Out of my sight! And you!' exclaimed he, shaking his attenuated hand at the attorney; 'and you, who led me on.'

The doctor turned to the attorney, and surveyed him from head to foot, as if the meaning of the words of the patient might be more fully explained by this investigation.

'What does he mean?' demanded he.

'He 's raving. He does n't know what he 's talking about.'

'Do n't I!' shouted Wilkins; 'do n't I! Out of my sight!' and he shook his fist at them, gnashing his teeth; 'out of my sight, liar! tempter! away with you!'

'We are increasing the violence of his paroxysm by remaining here,' said Bolton, nervously; 'let 's go.'

The doctor looked once more at his patient, then again at the lawyer, and finally suffered himself to be led out.

Crouching like a wild beast, and with the bed-clothes gathered tightly about him, Wilkins remained in a state of stupid fear after their departure. Every sense was concentrated in the single one of feeling. He did not dare to draw a long breath, lest it should snap the cord which bound his wretched body to life. Every sharp throe that shot through him sent a pang of mortal fear to his heart. Nor was his brain idle. Images of the past came crowding upon him. He thought of his wife; he saw her pale and wan face looking at him mournfully, but as affectionately as ever. Then came the features of Miss Crawford; then these all swept away, and his mind, recovering its balance, brought him back to the present. He looked about the room; he thought of himself. He stretched out his long bony arm, and fancied how it would look when the grave-worm was battenning upon it. He seemed to feel his frame decaying in the grave.

He felt the hot, stifling air of the coffin. The thought drove him to madness; and with a fierce, frantic effort he rose to his feet, and uttering a laugh of mingled terror and frenzy, hurraed until the room echoed, and then fell exhausted to the floor.

He was recalled to himself by feeling a hand upon his own, and hearing the voice of the attorney.

‘I’m glad to see you, Bolton,’ said he, faintly. ‘I’ve had a bad turn since you went out, but am better now. Help me to bed.’

The other, placing his arm under him, assisted him to the narrow pallet which formed his couch, and covered him up, tucking the cover far beneath between the bed and floor, and laying the hands of the sick man under it. Having done this, he seated himself in front of him.

‘What do you look at me so for?’ demanded Wilkins, who, whenever he raised his eyes, encountered those of Bolton fixed on his face.

‘How do you feel?’ asked Bolton, without replying to his question. ‘Don’t you think you could sleep? It would strengthen you.’

‘No, I’ll never sleep any more,’ replied the sick man, testily. ‘Keep your eyes off me, will you? They remind me of the Devil’s. Keep them off, or I’ll force you to.’

‘You forget that you are too weak to harm me,’ returned the attorney, with a sneer. ‘But I came back to have a parting word with you. You have broken your oath, and now look to yourself!’

‘If I have, I did it when I was out of my head, and perhaps may do it again; but that’s not my fault. I’m as deep in that Will matter as you are, and run as much risk. If I must be shut up for it when I get well, I must; and there’s the end of it.’

‘Not quite,’ said Bolton, edging nearer, and bending down on his knees, his lips quivering with intense wrath: ‘not quite. You ’ve to give an account to me first; and, by G—d! you *shall*!—*here*, on this very spot—a fearful one!’

‘My God! Bolton, what do you mean?’ exclaimed Wilkins, attempting to sit up. But Bolton thrust him back with a violence that made his head thump against the floor, even through the pillow.

‘You ’ll find out my meaning soon enough!’ said he, dragging the pillow from under Wilkins’s head, and seating himself astride of his breast. If ever mortal countenance bore the impress of agonizing fear, it was stamped upon that of the sick man. But still he attempted to laugh—and such a laugh!—a wild, discordant shout, whose tones deepened into a yell of terror; for Bolton was attempting to thrust the pillow over his mouth. Sick, feeble, dying though he was, the struggle was fearful. Twice was the pillow thrust upon his mouth, and as often forced away by the victim. He succeeded in extricating his arms from the bed-clothes, and fastening his fingers in the hair of the assassin, by sheer violence he bore him back to the floor. Bolton leaped to his feet, and Wilkins did the same. Hardened as the lawyer was, he shrank from the blazing eye and maniac look of the frantic and desperate man who confronted him. It was but for a moment. Again he sprang upon him, and bore him to the floor; and before he could recover himself, he seized the bed, threw it directly upon him, sprang upon it, and stretching himself at full length upon it, held it down by the whole weight of his body. Terrible indeed were the struggles of the wretch who writhed and twisted beneath! But Bolton kept his hold until they grew more and more feeble, the smothered cries ceased, and all was quiet. Then he rose, spread the bed as before, and dragging the body to it,

deposited it in its place, removing all traces of the struggle, and composing the limbs, as if the troubled spirit which had once animated that clay had gone on its long journey without mortal intervention.

While he was bending over the ghastly face of his victim, he heard a step on the stairs. Instinctively he sprang through the door and into the entry. At the head of the stairs he met a man who spoke to him. He recognized the voice of the physician, but made no reply; and hurrying past him, darted into the street. Up one street and down another he ran, doubling and turning as if the beagles of the law were already at his heels; only walking to recover breath, and then dashing off like the wind, as his excited fears converted each cry in the street into a sound of pursuit. But at length, weary and broken down, he found himself at the door of his office.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PALE, conscience-stricken, with images of fear and horror forcing themselves into his very brain, Bolton sat in his office that night. There was a heavy consciousness of crime and blood upon him that he had never felt before. He had left Wilkins stiff and stark in his own room, dead — dead; yet he was up and after him now. Amid all the fancied sounds of pursuit, the dead man glided along. He never saw him, but he knew that he was behind him, gazing at him with that same cold, passionless eye which had met his as he flung him dead upon his bed. It made his blood run cold. He changed his seat; but the spectre was still behind him. He *felt* it. In very desperation, he heaped the fire with fuel, and lighted candle after candle, until every chink and cranny in the time-stained room was perceptible. Still behind him sat the murdered man, with his eye fixed upon him. It never moved, but seemed to look him through and through. He could not bear it. Come what might, he *would* face it; he *would* look it down, if he died. Rising up and half staggering, he faced about. Ha! it was too quick for him! It was behind him again! God! was that a sigh that he heard? He gasped for breath and listened again. It was only the wind wailing through the casement. Yet so fierce had been the pang, that he sank back in his chair, with the perspiration standing in large drops upon his forehead. Starting up, he went to the shelf, and lifting a pitcher containing water to his lips, drank off, at huge gulps, nearly the whole of its contents. He then sat down at the table and attempted to

write, but his mind wandered ; for almost every line was erased, interlined, and altered ; and at length he dashed his pen from him, threw himself back in his chair, and sat listlessly muttering in a low tone. Several hours had passed in this way, and he was first brought to himself by hearing a step on the stairs. Slow, deliberate, and solemn it came. There was no haste in that tread, no hesitation. The first feeling of the attorney was one of the most abject terror. His limbs shook ; his fingers clenched together involuntarily, and the quick, hard pulsations of his heart might have been distinctly heard. The step ascended the stairs. His first impulse was to secure the door ; but the utter uselessness of such a precaution struck him at the same instant. And then the improbability that the murder had yet been discovered flashed across his mind, and he had barely time to seat himself, when a hand rested on the knob, and the door was opened.

His visitor was a short, square-built man, with dark Jewish features, a bald head, a Roman nose, with a wart on it, a heavy eye-brow, and half-closed eyes, which, together with a drooping under-lip, would have given rather a sleepy look to his countenance, had it not been redeemed by two very bright black eyes, which were slyly peering from under the corner of their lids, in strong contrast to the heavy lineaments of the rest of his face. His frame was muscular and heavy ; though he trod with the quiet, stealthy step of a cat.

His first movement, on entering the room and ascertaining that Bolton was there, was to lock the door and put the key in his pocket. Then, going into the back office, he pushed a chair to the fire, and drawing off his gloves, held his short, strong fingers over the flame. Bolton's heart sank as he recognized in his visitor the most noted and vigilant officer of the city police. But as real danger approached, his ima-

ginary ones vanished ; and he prepared to play his part with that coolness and skill which was one of his great characteristics, and which had guided him safely past many a rock on which his previous roguery had nearly wrecked him.

Bowing to his visitor, and requesting him to excuse him for a moment, he pretended to read a paper which he held in his hand, while, in reality, he was arranging in his mind the best mode of meeting the officer.

‘Well, Mr. Tike, I’m at your service,’ said he at length, placing the paper on the table. ‘What can I do for you?’

‘Put on your hat and over-coat,’ responded Mr. Tike, laconically.

‘With pleasure, if it is necessary,’ replied Bolton, somewhat startled at the stern, abrupt tone of the speaker. ‘But what is the nature of the business ; and where am I to go?’

‘The natur’ is oncommon ; the place, the Lock-up.’

Bolton felt a chilling presentiment of the worst ; but—he would not give up while there was a chance.

‘Ah !’ said he, thoughtfully ; ‘some poor fellow in trouble. What is it ? Debt or felony ? or what ?’

‘Felony of the first degree,’ replied Mr. Tike, holding up his thick foot to the fire, while he applied his handkerchief to his nose.

‘Is he in prison ?’ demanded Bolton, for the purpose of sifting more thoroughly the enigmatical meaning of the officer.

‘He’s as good as in,’ replied Mr. Tike, feeling the key in his pocket. ‘He’ll soon be ; he’s took.’

Again the attorney experienced that foreboding of ill which had so nearly unmanned him when he heard the first step of his visitor in the passage. But a single glance at the half-closed and watchful eye of the policeman showed him the necessity of rallying his energies ; for the slightest tremor

or a single equivocal word might lead him to the gallows ; and assuming a careless manner, he approached the peg where his over-coat hung, as if for the purpose of taking it down. Then pausing, he turned to the officer, and said :

‘As this person is not yet in prison, and I have several matters of importance to attend to, I would be glad if you could send some one to let me know when he *is* in. It would save my time, which is precious ; and I would go to him immediately.

‘It won’t do, Mr. Bolton,’ replied Mr. Tike, with something between a wink and a leer. ‘He’s took, as I said afore.’

‘Well, then, why all this trifling ? Why not say so at once ? When was he taken, and where ?’ demanded Bolton, sternly ; ‘and what does he want with me ?’

In reply to these interrogatories, Mr. Tike quietly drew the door-key from his pocket, and placing it against his nose, ogled Bolton through the handle.

‘He was captured about ten minutes ago, in this ’ere room, by this ’ere key ; and he wants you to go to prison as his substitute.’

Bolton threw a hasty look about the room. The windows were all closed and high from the ground. He glanced at his own spare frame, and measured its strength with that of the ponderous and muscular man before him. He looked about for a weapon of defence. On the top of a desk opposite him lay an old hatchet, which had once aided in a murder, whose perpetrator he had screened from justice. As his eye rested on it, his purpose was fixed. So was that of Mr. Tike, who had watched his eye, and also saw the weapon.

Without changing his position or altering a muscle, Bolton turned to the officer and said :

‘This is a strange enigma. Speak out, will you, and tell me plainly what you want ?’

‘Well, then, plainly, I want *you*!’ responded Mr. Tike, ‘to show cause why you should not be hanged for murder’

‘Murder!’ ejaculated Bolton.

‘Ay, murder! Mr. Bolton. You was seen to attack a weak man, sick, alone, and about to die; you was seen struggling with him, to grasp his throat, to throw him down, and to smother him; and then to leave him, as if he had died a nat’ral death. This you was seen to do, Mr. Bolton, this very night; and that man was one who was your friend—Wilkins!’

‘Tis false!—false as hell!’ shouted Bolton, his eyes starting, and his hair bristling with horror at the description of the policeman. ‘I did not! you cannot prove it! I’ll not go with you, to be murdered on a charge like that! By the living God! I’ll not! See here!’ shouted he, springing to the hatchet, and brandishing it like a maniac over his head; ‘see here! With this I’ll defend myself to the last—to the last gasp! Ha! ha! have I thwarted you, old bloodhound? Have I thwarted you? One step toward me—ay, one inch, and I bury this in your skull! Keep off! *both of you—both of you!* Ay, even though *he* help you, I’ll not give up!’

The policeman drew a pistol from his pocket, and without moving from his seat, cocked it, and pointed it at the attorney.

‘Look ye, Mr. Bolton,’ said he, ‘an axe is a dangerous we’pon; but a pistol is dangerouser. I’ve no objection to your being frightened. It’s all in course, and you may even shake that cleaver at me; but you must n’t come nearer with it, and you must n’t resist the law; for I came here to take you, and, living or dead, I’ll *do* it. So put up your axe, or I’ll quiet you with a bullet.’

For a moment the attorney glared about him like a baf-

fled tiger, and measured the distance between himself and the muzzle of the pistol. Had there been the slightest tremor in the hand that grasped it, or the shadow of irresolution in the face of Mr. Tike, he would have hazarded the struggle; but there was none: he saw that resistance was useless; and with a muttered curse he dashed the hatchet to the floor, and taking his coat from the peg, put it on without a word, and turning to the officer, said that he was ready to accompany him.

‘You’d better take your hat and put on your gloves, for it’s a cold night,’ said Mr. Tike, returning the pistol to his pocket, and drawing forth the key. ‘Now step forward like a reasonable man,’ said he, as he unlocked the door. ‘There, take my arm, my left arm, if you please; I want my right for service. There,’ said he, grasping the sleeve of the arm that was placed within his own, ‘now you act reasonable, and we shall get on quite comfortable.’ As he spoke, he strode along the dark entry with the rapid and sure step of one who was familiar with it; and turning up the street, led his prisoner off to those dens of darkness and misery, ycleped THE TOMBS.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN the physician had been led by Bolton from the room in which Wilkins lay ill, as mentioned in a previous chapter, he suffered himself to be conducted down the stairs and into the street without remark ; Bolton keeping at his side, and endeavoring to employ his thoughts on other subjects than that of his patient, until a long interval of gloomy streets and many a high dingy house lay between them and the scene they had left. Then, on the pretence that he had urgent business to attend to, he left him, and making a short circuit, returned to Wilkins, as has already been narrated.

No sooner, however, was he gone, than the doctor stopped too, and watched him until his figure was hid in the gloom of the streets, and then he raised his finger and shook it after him. Could any one have observed his face, he would have seen suspicion, dislike, and anger all stamped upon it. He did not stir from the spot, but, folding his arms, stood musing, with the red light of a lamp flashing over his features, and giving them a harsh, uncouth expression. At last he said, in a low, stern tone :

‘ I have seen hundreds die ; ay, go howling to their graves ; and I have stood by while mother, children, and friends were begging me to give life to a worn-out carcass, as if life and death were in *my* gift ; and when the breath was gone, I have had them to turn upon me and revile me because I could not step between the Almighty and his decrees : and I have borne it all without flinching, for I knew that it was human nature. Yet never have I seen any thing so horrible

as the look of that sick man this night. He must die — he *must*; but,' continued he, in the same tone, 'he must not be *murdered*; and if ever human being had the look of an assassin, it was the man whom I found there; and if ever an eye *looked* murder, his did, as that wretched criminal cursed and accused him. As sure as I'm a living man, there was murder in that look. I'll see to it!' And turning about, he once more sought the sick man's room.

His heart beat quickly, and something like a shudder passed over him, as he encountered a man darting with headlong speed from the building; for dark as it was, he yet detected a resemblance to Bolton in his figure.

On entering the room, a glance showed him that Wilkins was lying there, apparently dead; and although there was nothing to justify a suspicion that he had met with foul play, yet that suspicion was in his mind; and at the same instant came the hope that he might have interrupted the murderer before his work was accomplished. The idea, and to act upon it, were simultaneous. He went straight to the bed, opened Wilkins's shirt, and placed his hand upon his heart. He had held it there for some moments, when he felt it beat. It stopped, fluttered as if about to cease its labor for ever, then it beat again. In a moment his lancet was out, a vein was opened, a few simple applications, such as were ready at hand, were made, and Wilkins slowly opened his eyes and looked about him.

'You may thank God, my poor fellow, that HE put such suspicions in my head as never came into it before, or your last breath would have been drawn before this!' said the doctor, kneeling beside Wilkins, and supporting his head on his breast, while he bathed his temples with some liquid which he took from a cup at his side. 'If ever you uttered thanks to God, do it now!'

Wilkins stared about him ; but at first his mind wandered. He had no recollection of what had happened ; and the few words which he uttered were vague and indistinct. He knew that high words had passed between himself and the lawyer, and that they had had a scuffle.

‘Can you remember nothing else?’ said the Doctor, earnestly.

Wilkins passed his hand feebly across his brow, and shook his head. ‘He could not.’

While this was going on, the door of the room opened, and a sharp face was thrust in, while a tremulous voice inquired :

‘How is he? Did he kill him?’

The doctor looked up at the face, and then told it to come in and tell what it meant.

The man to whom the face belonged hesitated. Before venturing in, he looked behind him to see that there was no impediment to a rapid retreat in case of necessity ; and then, accepting the doctor’s invitation, advanced toward him, displaying at the same time the rest of a person very far gone in decay and shabbiness.

‘Well, what do you want to know?’ demanded the doctor, who had laid Wilkins in the bed, and now stood up. ‘You ask if that man,’ said he, pointing to Wilkins, ‘is killed. Who wanted to kill him? Did you?’

The thin man replied in not a very firm voice : ‘No ; but I saw a man who was trying to.’

‘You did, eh?’ said the doctor.

The stranger nodded.

‘Then why did n’t you come over and help him, instead of leaving him to struggle single-handed with a man of ten times his present strength?’

The thin man made no reply to this question ; but con-

tented himself with brushing a remarkably old hat with the sleeve of a coat not a little the worse for wear, although there was no probability that either article of apparel would be benefited by the process.

‘Do you know who made this attempt?’ said the doctor after a long pause, during the whole of which he seemed struggling to repress a strong inclination to fall on the new-comer and flog him on the spot.

‘Not his name,’ replied the stranger, evidently relieved at the pacific termination of the doctor’s reverie; at the same time adding variety to his proceeding by rolling his hat into a very small compass, for no other apparent purpose than that of unrolling it, which he did instantly.

‘Well, *I* do,’ said the doctor. ‘That will answer as well. But first of all, tell me what you saw.’

The stranger paused, and having cleared his throat, and gone through the form of feeling in his pocket for a handkerchief which had never been there, said that he was at the window of his house on the opposite side of the street, when his attention was attracted to what was going on in Wilkins’s room, which he could distinctly see, as there was a light in it, while his own room had none. The man described the scene which had taken place between Wilkins and the attorney; and frankly confessed he had been so much excited and frightened at what he had witnessed that he lost all presence of mind; and it was not until the attorney took to flight that he thought of giving the alarm.

‘You will swear to all this at the police-office, will you?’

‘Yes; to-night, if you choose.’

‘Very well, you shall,’ replied the doctor laconically. ‘Now I want some one to stay with this man, and watch him. Who can I get? He must not be left alone, for that fellow may return.’

‘Get me some one, for God’s sake!’ exclaimed Wilkins feebly, and clasping his hands together. ‘Oh! do n’t leave me again in his power!’

‘Be quiet!’ said the doctor; ‘you shall be taken care of, even though I should remain here to do it myself. Who will stay here?’ inquired he, again addressing the stranger.

The thin man stole on tip-toe to the window, thrust his head out, and bellowed in a voice which had wonderfully increased in power within the last few moments: ‘Tom Stubbs! Tom Stubbs! I say. He’ll answer by and by,’ said he, jerking in his head, and awaiting a response with great patience and composure. But he was mistaken in his conjecture; and after a pause he again thrust out his head: ‘Tom Stubbs! Tom Stubbs! you infernal low-lived vagabond! where are you?’

‘Here!’ responded a faint voice, which sounded as if it came from under a distant barrel.

‘Well, why did n’t you say so at first? Bring yourself over here, will you? — and be quick!’

That Tom Stubbs made a response of some kind was evident from the fact that certain uncouth sounds were heard from the opposite side of the street, which must have been something of that nature, unless Mr. Stubbs was addicted to soliloquy; but whatever it was, it did not impede his operations; for in a few minutes Mr. Stubbs brought himself over in the shape of a little oily fellow with red cheeks and fat legs, whom he introduced by simply saying:

‘Well, old fellow! here I am. What do you want?’

‘Do you see that man?’ said the thin one, pointing to Wilkins.

‘Well, suppose I do! — what then?’ inquired Mr. Stubbs, anxious to investigate results before committing himself; ‘and suppose I do n’t! — what *then*?’

‘Some one has been mighty near giving him a walking-ticket to see what sort of lodgings the sexton keeps.’

‘Whew!’ whistled Mr. Stubbs; ‘licensed or unlicensed?—physic or murder?—which?’

‘Murder! murder the most foul,’ said the other, extending his arm energetically toward the ceiling, with an undulating motion, which would have been deeply impressive, had not the gentleman been compelled to bring his performance to a rather precipitate conclusion, owing to a sudden rupture in a portion of his apparel.

Mr. Stubbs looked about the room; an examination which seemed very cursory, but which had embraced every thing in it before he answered:

‘Well, cuss me if I see any thing that was worth the risk. It must ‘a’ been a grudge.’

‘It was,’ interrupted the doctor, impatiently; ‘it was. An infernal scoundrel, taking advantage of his being ill and unable to help himself, attempted to murder him to settle an old grievance. And I want you to watch here, lest he should come back and complete what he left unfinished. I’ll pay you for your trouble.’

‘Well, that’s honorable,’ said Mr. Stubbs, ‘and I won’t even insinuate the propriety of handing over the dust beforehand. Oh no! I would n’t think of it!’

The doctor put his hand in his pocket and drew out a silver dollar, which he flung to him.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Stubbs, ‘I had no idea of such quick returns for my investments. But punctuality is the soul of business; and I won’t make you feel unhappy by refusing. Oh no! It’s not in my natur’, it is n’t. My heart is all milk, Sir—all mother’s milk. I’ll watch him like a babe; and if that there chap comes agin, blast my eyes! but I’ll wring his neck—so! If I do n’t, damme!’ And by way

of illustrating his words more fully, Mr. Stubbs looked ferociously at the wall, and seizing himself by the cravat, twisted it round till he was black in the face; all the time grating his teeth with a kind of savage satisfaction at the idea of performing that pleasant little process, even though the subject of it was his own respectable self.

‘There, Sir,’ said he, relaxing his hold, when he had brought himself to the very verge of strangulation; ‘that is what I’ll do to him! I might have carried the experiment farther; but it was n’t safe. Another twist might have been a little too much, Sir. One very respectable gentleman of my acquaintance found it so. He was in the habit of diverting himself in that way; twisting his cravat till his face was as black as ink. But one day, Sir, he carried the joke so far that he could n’t bring it back again, and cuss me if he did n’t choke himself in real earnest; affording a sad example of the mutability of earthly events, and of the danger of trifling with the human wind-pipe by means of red silk pocket-handkerchers.’

Having thus completed his illustration, and delivered himself of his commentary on it, Mr. Stubbs took a seat on a small stool, and commenced adjusting his neckcloth, which the fervor of his previous demonstration had very much discomposed.

‘You’ll look after him, will you?’ said the doctor, eyeing him as if in doubt whether to leave Wilkins in his charge or not.

‘To be sure I will,’ said Mr. Stubbs, still continuing his toilette.

‘He must be kept quiet: no talking.’

‘He sha’ n’t open his mouth,’ said the other, resolutely.

‘He must n’t get up,’ continued the doctor.

‘If he *does*, I’ll knock him down,’ replied Mr. Stubbs in a determined tone.

‘You must n’t hurt him.’

‘Oh no! in coorse not. I’ll knock him down gently, very gently.’

The doctor paused.

‘Any physic to be took?’ asked Mr. Stubbs. ‘Don’t be afeard. If it’s to be took, say so. Cuss me if he sha’ n’t swaller it! You say the word, that’s all.’

‘No, not to-night.’

‘Oh! very well. You can go now as soon as you please. I know what’s to be did, and *did* it shall be.’

The doctor gave one or two directions to Wilkins, and urging him to keep quiet, at last went out, accompanied by the thin stranger.

Mr. Stubbs followed the doctor’s advice to the letter; for no sooner was the latter gone than he seated himself on the floor, and placing his back against the door so that it was impossible to open it without awakening him, in less than one minute was completing a sound nap which had been interrupted when he was summoned to enter upon his present duty.

The result of the complaint of the two personages who had just retired has already been shown in the arrest of the attorney, whom we left accompanying Mr. Tike to the Tombs, and to whom we must now return.

Bolton had been locked up for the night; but he had previously learned, to his great relief, that he had not succeeded in his attempt upon the life of Wilkins. The idea of the gallows had haunted him incessantly; and now he looked upon imprisonment as a trifle scarcely to be regarded. But still it was a wretched night for him, and he paced his room until the dim light breaking through the windows told him that it was day.

Early in the morning the door of his chamber was un-

bolted, and Mr. Tike walked in. 'Come, Sir,' said he, 'the justice is here, and you'll be disposed of in short order. You'll be 'zaminèd, and I suppose afore breakfast you'll be bailed. This way, this way,' said he, leading the way along an entry, and descending a flight of stairs. 'A very comfortable place this is, when once you're accustomed to it. A little morsel dampish; but that you know is quite nat'ral, considering that it's built over a quagmire.'

Bolton made no reply, but followed him into the police-office. It was a large room, half railed off, and with a bar running across it to indicate who were the justices and who the criminals; the main distinction between the two being that the former sat behind the bar, and the latter stood before it.

The first of these positions was occupied by a tall, stout man, with iron-gray hair, and a pair of spectacles surmounting a nose which, from the excessive modesty of its owner, had acquired a perpetual blush. He was administering justice in small doses to vagabonds, and in large ones to thieves; and having got through with the accumulation of the night, he called 'Bolton!'

The attorney walked up to the bar.

'An unpleasant business this, Sir, quite unpleasant;' said the justice, laying aside the magisterial tone which he had used to the 'accumulation' just mentioned, and which, being for the most part composed of the wretched and starving, was entitled to nothing better; and assuming toward Bolton that air of deference which is always due to great rogues in contradistinction to small ones.

Bolton made no reply to this remark, but said, in a stern tone,

'I should like to know with what I am charged.'

The justice saw that the attorney was in no humor to

appreciate civility, and as he had, more than once, come in disagreeable collision with him when Bolton was defending others, and had, in the course of such collision, imbibed a profound dread of the lawyer, and now felt fully assured that, if there was a loop-hole for escape in the law, he would find it, he had no wish to irritate him; so he quietly slunk into himself, after having called 'Mr. Harvey.'

'Sir!' exclaimed an elderly man in a foxy wig, who was dozing beside the justice, with his head resting on a large book with a red cover. The justice nodded toward Bolton, and said: 'Complaint against him?'

'Oh!' said Mr. Harvey, sitting up and rubbing both eyes with his knuckles. 'We'll oblige him—we will. What's his name?'

'Bolton,' replied the attorney, sternly.

'Oh! ah!' said the man, fumbling among a number of papers which were lying in front of him. 'Stykes—that's not it; Booney—nor that; Smith—nor that; Horpins, White, Arnold, Higgins, Traney, Jones, Bolton. Ah! that's it! Reuben Bolton; the last one—sure to be the last one; always the way when a man's in a hurry. I would swear to it. Shall I read it?'

'Yes!' said Bolton.

And Mr. Harvey, after having cleared his throat several times, and taking a very moderate sip of water, which he distributed over his lips, ingeniously using his tongue as a trowel, proceeded in a deliberate tone, and with an utter disregard of stops or punctuation, to read the affidavits and examination of the doctor and the thin gentleman, setting forth the facts of the attempt against the life of Wilkins.

'Is the complainant and his witness here?' demanded Bolton, calmly.

'They are in there,' said the justice, pointing to a small room adjoining the office.

'Will you oblige me by examining them at once? The whole thing is a trick or a mistake.'

'Perhaps you 'd better come in there. It's more private, and won't be so unpleasant for you.'

Bolton made no reply, but followed him into the room and took a seat at the table. A single glance told him that the doctor was there, and had his eye on him; and he did not venture a second one; but as the justice called the doctor, he said, without raising his eyes: 'Let the other witness leave the room.'

An officer approached the thin man, and whispering a few words in his ear, escorted him beyond the door, after which he returned for the purpose of hearing what was going on.

The magistrate seated himself at the table, drew an ink-stand toward him, and clearing his throat and shaking his head for the purpose of removing all obstructions, both physical and intellectual, commenced his examination. When this was ended, the thin witness was called in, and gave his testimony.

Bolton sat during the greater part of the time with his head leaning on his hand, his brow knit, occasionally suggesting a question as the examination proceeded. When the depositions had been signed, the justice turned to Bolton:

'You are aware that it is now my duty to examine you, and that you are at liberty to answer or not, as you please.'

'I am aware of that,' replied the lawyer, 'and shall avail myself of the privilege which the law gives me of being silent. So that it is not necessary to send off the witnesses,' said he, seeing that an officer was preparing to lead them out.

‘Very well,’ replied the justice, folding up the papers and taking off his spectacles.

‘It’s too early to look for bail now, so I must trouble you for an hour or two longer,’ said Bolton : ‘beside, the bail in this case is a matter which the Circuit judge must settle, I suppose.’

The magistrate said that ‘it was ;’ and Bolton, with an abruptness which foiled all attempts of that functionary to open a conversation, got up and followed an officer to his ‘room,’ establishing himself in his good opinion by giving him a dollar, and ordering a good breakfast and a barber.

CHAPTER XXX.

EITHER the blood-letting which Wilkins had undergone proved beneficial, or his disease took a favorable turn; for on the following day, contrary to the predictions of the physician, he awoke much better. His first impulse was to get up; but this Mr. Stubbs, who combined the duties of nurse and watchman, prevented by unceremoniously thrusting him back in the bed, and telling him to keep quiet, according to orders. Wilkins at any other time might have felt disposed to resist, but he was too feeble to venture upon any thing of the kind then; while Mr. Stubbs, to show that he acted with full impartiality, stretched himself in a similar position on the floor, and maintained it until relieved from duty by the appearance of the doctor.

Now that the strength of his disease was broken, Wilkins began to improve rapidly. On the following day he was able to sit up, and in a short time to go into the street and breathe an atmosphere pure, when compared with that which stagnated in his own room.

One fine morning, as his strength began to increase, Wilkins resolved to go out. He had hitherto been very slovenly in his dress, for he was wretchedly poor; and but that Higgs quietly supplied him with food, he might have starved. Drawing his tattered clothes about him, for he felt cold, he set out, carefully avoiding the thoroughfares in which he was in the habit of walking, and slinking through by-streets and narrow lanes, toward his old home. Since his illness, the thought of that old place had constantly haunted him; and

a tide of old recollections and feelings and affections, which seemed long since dead, had sprung into life, and was flooding his heart, overflowing it until pride, resentment, and shame were all swept away. Back he *would* go to the old spot, and look at it once more; for it had been the home of his wife, and his heart was full of love for her now; and a faint and scarcely defined hope shot across him, that she might have returned to it; and desolate as it was, might he not find her sitting there, watching for him? He inwardly prayed that it might be so, and that her glad face might be the first thing to greet him as he knocked. His heart beat violently as he came in front of it, for the same screens which hung at the windows when he lived there were there still, and he observed a fire burning within, and that the room was occupied. He went to the door and opened it noiselessly. Every thing there was strange. A coarse-looking woman was sitting near the fire, and a child was playing on the floor. He closed the door in the same cautious manner in which he had opened it; and leaning his head against the wall, the hot tears streamed down his cheeks, and heavy sobs burst from him, such as had never escaped him in all his troubles. He left the house feeling reckless, and wandered back to his abode; and sat down with his head bent on his knees and his hair hanging wildly over his face. The door of his room opened whilst he was in this state; but he did not move until a hand was placed on his shoulder, and the voice of Higgs said:

‘George! I’ve news for you.’

Wilkins looked up, and as he did so he observed that Higgs was much excited, and that his cheek was pale. He demanded hastily, ‘Well, Bill, out with it! is it good or bad?’

‘*You’ll* think it good. *I* think it d——d bad!’ said Higgs, laconically.

“Good news is scarce; let’s have it,” said Wilkins, impatiently.

“Well, you’ve *one* trouble less in your way; your wife —

“What of her?” demanded Wilkins, quickly; “what of *her*, I say?”

“She’s gone!”

“Gone! where?”

“Dead — dead and buried!”

Wilkins clasped his hands tight over his heart, and rose to his feet: a sharp hysterical sob escaped him, and he reeled as if he would have fallen; but he recovered himself in a moment, and approaching Higgs, asked, in a voice so preternaturally calm that it awed his comrade,

“Is that true, Bill — on your soul?”

“It is.”

“Who told you?”

“I heard it from Phillips, who is searching the whole city for you. You’ll find him at his rooms. But you’d better not see him now, for on my life I believe he’ll murder you.”

Wilkins turned from him without reply, and rushed from the house. Turning neither to the right nor left, but hurrying on with an impetuosity which attracted the attention of hundreds whom he passed, he made for Phillips’s house by a sort of instinct, for there was little reason left to guide him. He knocked at the door, and no sooner was it opened, than he darted up stairs, and into Phillips’s room.

Phillips was sitting at a table opposite the door, with a book in front of him, but he was not reading; for his eyes were directed toward the floor, and altogether he had the air of one buried in deep and unpleasant thought. He did not look up as Wilkins entered.

Wilkins went to a chair which stood close to him and

seated himself, and touching Phillips, said, in a quick, husky tone :

‘Jack, where ’s Lucy?’

‘So you’ve come at last!’ said Phillips, slowly rising to his full height, and looking at him as if he would wither him with his glance; ‘and to inquire after *her* whose happiness you blasted, whose life you cursed, whose young heart you trampled on; whose name you branded, and whom you drove from your door as if she were the outcast that your lying lips dared to call her! And now that she is dead and in her grave, you ask where she is! George!’ said he, with a strong effort mastering the fierce emotion that shook him from head to foot, ‘but for the memory of old times, and for my promise to *her*, I could feel it in me to dash your brains out as you stand! I can scarcely keep my fingers off you!’

Still Wilkins did not move; and the fierce excitement of Phillips seemed to have no effect upon him; for he merely repeated his question: ‘Jack, where ’s Lucy?’

‘Where your infernal villany sent her before her time!’ exclaimed Phillips, hesitating to strike a man who made no resistance, and yet burning to avenge the wrongs which he had inflicted upon his wife; ‘in her grave!’

Wilkins started up, pressed his hand upon his heart as if a sudden pain had shot through it, and then sat down. Again that same sharp hysteric sob escaped him, but no other sound.

‘If you would see her,’ continued Phillips in the same stern tone, ‘go to the church-yard.’

Wilkins looked at him like one who heard the words, but did not take in their meaning.

‘Do you hear me?’ demanded Phillips.

Wilkins stood up, smiled vacantly, and said, ‘Yes, yes;

I'll go there !' Then, pressing both hands to his temples, he said, in a low, plaintive tone : ' My head 's very wild ; I can 't think any more. All 's confused and strange. Where did you say Lucy was ? Nothing has happened to her ? ' He took Phillips by the shoulders, and held him off at arms' length, and gazed in his face. Then, with a faint laugh, he said : ' I see — it 's all right. I was afraid that there was something wrong.' And he sat down. ' There can 't be any thing wrong. No harm can have happened to her — can there ? '

Even Phillips was unnerved by the expression of deep anguish stamped upon the face of the broken-down man who crouched before him and looked so wistfully up in his face.

' Go on, Jack ! ' said he ; ' tell me all ; what she said, what she did, and where she is. There is something wrong here ! ' said he, touching his head ; ' but I can listen when you talk of *her*. Go on, I say.'

Phillips, thus adjured, and recollecting his promise to Lucy, told him all that had passed, without reserve.

Wilkins sat motionless in his chair, with his hands clasped around his knees, and his wild eyes gleaming like two stars from amid his dishevelled hair.

' Is that all ? ' said he, when Phillips had concluded. ' Tell me every thing. Do n't be afraid. I 'm seared *here*,' said he, again pointing to his head ; ' and my heart won't break. It 's iron.'

' You've heard all, George ; her last words were a blessing on you.'

' Yes, yes ! ' said he, rising to his feet, and looking vacantly about him. ' Yes, yes : I know that. Poor Lucy ! Well, they buried her, did n't they ? ' And he looked Phillips earnestly in the face, and paused until he was answered.

‘That’s all right. Where was it?’ said he, in the same vacant manner, and pausing as before for an answer.

Phillips mentioned the place, and Wilkins stood for a long time with his hands locked together, dreaming over it, and in his mind conjuring up the memory of the past, and tracing out old scenes.

‘She was very young then,’ muttered he, ‘with her long black hair playing in the wind, and those laughing eyes! How merry her voice was! Her laugh went to one’s heart; yet it was soft, too. She was very gentle, and as tender hearted as a child. After that I did n’t see her for a year or two; and she had grown to be quite a woman — and I married her.’ He paused, passed his hand across his brow, and looking mournfully at Phillips, said: ‘Jack, I came to see you about something; but I’ve forgotten what it was. It’s a sad thing to have a bad memory — very sad. Stop!’ He placed his hands over his eyes, and stood for some minutes in silence. ‘It was something about Lucy. What did you say of her? Where is she?’

Phillips rose and took his hands in his. He had no trace of anger against him now. He could not have harbored it for an instant against the poor brain-shattered being before him.

‘Sit down, George,’ said he, ‘sit down; and I’ll tell it all again. *Do*, there’s a good fellow.’

But Wilkins impatiently repeated his question: ‘What was it? What was it? Where is she? Do n’t worry me, Jack. I’m very feeble. Where is she?’

‘Poor fellow!’ exclaimed Phillips.

‘Oh! Jack, this is not right!’ said Wilkins, earnestly; ‘it’s not right to keep her away. Where is she? Let me know the worst.’

‘I have already told you, George.’

‘Yes, yes; I know it: but tell me again. Where is she?’

Phillips’s answer was almost a whisper, as he said, ‘In the grave!’

Wilkins shrank from him; and with something like a shudder attempted to draw his coat around him, as if attacked by sudden cold. The next instant, without noise, almost like a shadow, he passed from the room, and was in the street.

On the second night after Wilkins’s interview with Phillips, a man was passing through the village where Lucy was buried. He walked feebly, and occasionally paused and looked up at the clear sky, and said something in a low tone, and then went on.

Pale, emaciated, with hollow eyes and sunken cheeks, none would have recognized Wilkins; yet he it was. Disease and remorse had done their work, and the wild glassy eye which glittered in the pale moon-beam like a living flame, showed that the spirit within was burning too brightly for reason.

Once or twice he observed persons coming from an opposite direction, and he shrank into the bushes, and crouched there until they had passed, and then resumed his course toward the church. Sometimes he stood still, stared vacantly about him, then placing his hand to his forehead, hurried forward, muttering as before.

Arrived at the gate of the edifice, he stopped, and, as if altering his mind, quitted it and went to the front of the church and tried the door. It was not bolted, and opened with a melancholy creak, which echoed up the empty aisles. Wilkins listened, shook his head, and went in. He wandered listlessly up one aisle and down another. At last, coming to a pew-door, he opened it, entered, and sat down. Before him lay a small prayer-book, much worn and stained,

but on it a name was still legible in gilt letters. He took it up and held it in the moon-light, where he read in the indistinct light the words LUCY WATERS. It was the name of his wife before he had married her. He laid the book in its place, and bending his head forward against it, groaned audibly. 'Lucy!' whispered he; 'Lucy! dear Lucy! Do you hear me? Pray for me, Lucy!'

He listened, as if expecting an answer; then turned and gazed timidly about him. 'Lucy! Lucy! I say;' exclaimed he more loudly, pushing back the matted hair which hung over his eyes, and staring wildly around the church. Getting up, he went along the aisle to the door communicating with the burial-ground. This he flung open, and strode out, keeping on until his eye rested on a simple tablet at the farthest end of the yard, newly erected, and the inscription on which was plainly legible in the moon-light. He stopped and read: '*Lucy, wife of George Wilkins.*' 'That's me!' muttered he; 'that's me!'

He crouched on the sod. He bowed his head to the earth; thick-crowding fancies, mingled with all phantasies of madness, came sweeping through his brain. The present was forgotten. Again he was a boy; again the bright days of youth and purity were before him: his past life was a dream. She could not be dead! That warm, confiding heart, which had loved him so well, could not be cold for ever! It was a dream; a wild and troubled dream! He shouted loudly to awake himself; *but he awoke not*. He clutched the dank weeds in his hands; he knelt down upon the grave; he laid his cheek to the cold earth that shrouded her, and whispered her name. He whispered it again, in those low, gentle tones which, in the days of their early attachment, she had always loved and always responded to. He whispered it again. 'No answer!' muttered he. 'She's

gone! she's gone for ever! or she would not have been silent now, when my heart is broken, and all the world is against me. Lucy! Lucy! *dear* Lucy! do you hear me? Answer, oh! answer me *now*!

The wretched man stretched himself upon the cold earth, and sobbed like a heart-broken girl. The past came crowding upon him, until by degrees the mild fit was over. He remembered the hot, angry feelings between himself and his wife; his taunts, his bickerings, his sneers; and last of all the *blow* which had separated them for ever. Then he thought of his tempter — of Bolton. Revenge was now uppermost. Frantic with fury, he sprang from the grave, rushed through the church-yard, flung open the gate, and hurried down the road as if life and death depended on his speed.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE attorney had been admitted to bail in a heavy amount. Few would have assisted him from feelings of friendship ; but he had so strong a hold upon the fears of many, that he found no difficulty in obtaining sureties for his appearance to stand his trial and abide the sentence of the law. These being given, he was once more at large, to scheme and plan.

It was on a bright, clear afternoon that he was walking along the street toward his office. That morning the Surrogate had decided the forged Will to be valid, and had admitted it to probate. The dearest scheme of his heart had succeeded, yet he wore a clouded brow. He had much to harass him, for the Grand Jury had brought in a bill against him for his attempt upon the life of Wilkins, and in a few days he would be obliged to appear as a felon at the bar. He felt but too truly that his course had been such as to repel all sympathy, and to gather about his path only those who would rejoice at his downfall. 'Imprisonment! disgrace! a convict! — a convict!' muttered he. 'Shall I run for it? — forfeit my recognizance, and in a foreign land laugh to scorn their laws, and shut my ears to the opinion of the world? My wealth will command respect. The world might taunt with his infamy 'Bolton, the plodding lawyer, who starved on his fees and truckled to the rich;' but who will dare to insult the owner of two hundred thousand dollars?' And he raised himself erect, and looked menacingly about him, as if to confront any such offender, while his lip curled in scorn of those who in his fancy bent the knee to his coffers.

‘Well, well; I’ll think of it. There’s time enough yet. Could I but bribe those witnesses to forfeit their bonds and be out of the way, I might easily silence Wilkins. Indeed, I’m told that he was seen but yesterday, stark mad; so that his evidence goes for nothing. One of those men is poor; gold might work upon him — and I could spare much rather than risk this public exposure. But the other — the doctor; there’s the rub — *there’s the rub!*’

Thus musing and muttering, Bolton went on. But he felt that he had not that steadiness of purpose which usually marked him. There was a heaviness about his faculties which he could not shake off; and at times a strange fear flung its shadow over his heart. It came and went almost in the same moment, leaving nothing behind it but a vague dread of — he knew not what. He could trace it to no cause. He endeavored to reason himself out of it. He was in perfect health; somewhat jaded and worn down by mental anxiety, it was true; but his physical condition had never been better. He drew a long breath. His lungs played freely. He stamped his foot on the ground to try its strength. ‘Nothing wrong *there,*’ said he. ‘I should say that twenty good years were before me. I may have taxed my brain, but I never abused my body; and the reward of my abstinence will be a green old age — ay, and a wealthy one!’ As he said this, the word ‘IMPRISONMENT’ sounded so distinctly in his ear that it made him start; and he turned to see who had uttered it; but there was no one near; and then came that same dark, creeping sensation of fear. The sky was clear and cloudless; the world was teeming with life; thousands were moving about him, full of strength and vigor, pursuing their every-day plans, and each carrying out his own great scheme of existence. *They* had no apprehension. They had no forebodings. They were but men, mortal like himself;

and why should he be haunted with these forebodings when *they* were not? '*They are not dreamers,*' said he, '*and I am!*'

It was late when he came to the house in which was his office. Every thing seemed so bright and cheerful in the streets, and the interior of the old building looked so gloomy and chilly, that he felt reluctant to enter it, but strolled on until it began to grow dark. Then he returned toward it. At the door he stopped, and looked up and down the street and at the sky. There were thoughts in the head of that man as he stood there, with his face turned toward the clear heavens, which had never been there before; yet he spoke not a word, but drawing a long breath of pure air, as if to fortify himself against the stagnant exhalations within, slowly ascended the stairs and entered his office.

'You may go, Tom,' said he to the boy, who was out of the office almost before the sentence was concluded.

Bolton looked abstractedly at the door after he was gone, as if he had something to say to him, and was endeavoring to recall it to his mind; and then he went into the other room and sat down. Several letters were lying on the table; and although it was his habit to open all letters immediately, yet he was now so absorbed in his own reflections, that he did not perceive them. At last he got up, lighted a candle, and taking them up one by one, read their superscriptions. One was in the hand-writing of Higgs; and this, with a slight feeling of trepidation, he opened. It ran thus:

'DEAR SIR: I've been at the Surrogate's office to-day, and find that the old boy has gone in your favor. When will you be ready to hand over the twenty thousand dollars? I want to get it as soon as possible, and be off; for after swearing to the execution of a document that never was executed, and to the signature of that very respectable old gentleman,

John Crawford, who I never clapped eyes on in all my life, I feel as if the air of the city was n't healthy for me. Perjury has done for Wilkins, for he's gone mad and will die soon; so you'll get clear of paying him, and might, in consideration of that, toss me over a few odd thousands. But I don't press that; and as we made the bargain fairly beforehand, I'll stick to it; and to tell the truth, I've known many a clever fellow swear to a lie for less than half the money. I'll call to-morrow; and if you can pony up by that time, I'd like it all the better, as I want to be out of the reach of the law, which has a devil of a long arm.

‘WILLIAM HIGGS.’

‘The sooner he goes, the better!’ said Bolton, throwing the letter on the table. ‘His testimony, if wanted hereafter, can be taken under a commission; and if not needed, he's better out of the way. But twenty thousand dollars cannot be raised by to-morrow. The thing's impossible.’

He sat drumming his fingers on the table, until they accidentally touched one of the other letters. He took it up and held it to the light. ‘It's from Camden,’ said he; ‘that old matter of Whalter and Ross. Let's see what he says.’

He broke the seal and read the first page, and then laid the letter down. He then opened the others, glanced at their contents, and threw them from him. As he did so, his eye accidentally fell again on the letter from Mr. Camden; and at the lower part of the page, below the signature, he observed the two words, ‘*Turn over.*’ Mechanically he took up the letter and read the postscript attached. In an instant his brow became knitted, his breath short and spasmodic. His eyes seemed starting from their sockets; and then, with a feeble, plaintive cry, almost like the wail of an infant, he sank back in his chair, completely powerless, his arms droop-

ing at his side, but with his eyes still fixed on the letter. The contents were these :

‘REUBEN BOLTON, ESQ. : ‘*Albany, March 10, 183—.*

‘DEAR SIR: Will you inform your client that Mr. Isaacs will have the money ready to pay off the mortgage on his farm in a week from to-day, at which time I will remit you a draft for the amount on one of the banks in your city.

‘The proposal made by you, in the suit of *Whalter vs. Ross*, Mr. Whalter declines acceding to ; and unless a more favorable one can be made, I shall notice the cause for trial at the next Circuit. You can see Mr. Ross, and learn whether he has any thing better to offer. Let me hear from you as early as possible ; as, in the event of my not doing so, I shall suppose that you have nothing further to propose, and shall proceed accordingly.

‘Yours respectfully,

(*Turn over.*)

‘JOHN CAMDEN.

‘P. S. I have just heard of the death of a client of yours, John Crawford. In the month of October last he was taken suddenly ill in this city, and being much alarmed, got me to draw up a Will, which he executed. He afterwards recovered, and went off, leaving it with me, intending to call for it on his return. His business, however, taking him in another direction, he did not return to Albany, and the Will is still in my possession. I shall be in the city in a few days, and will bring it with me. Please communicate this to his daughter, who, being his sole devisee, is the most interested in the matter.

J. C.’

Here was a Will of later date than his ; and all the attorney’s hopes and plans were blasted. Hour after hour passed ; still there he sat, looking at that letter. He seemed to have grown old since he entered the room. His face was haggard ;

his temples sunken ; and he twisted his fingers together with a kind of childish helplessness.

It was near midnight ; and a faint noise echoing through the street made him start and cast his eyes fearfully about him ; for he had grown within the last few hours as superstitious as a child. Then he thought of getting up and going to his own home, away from this sad, gloomy office ; but he was afraid. His thoughts were not of punishment. They were of the grave ; of the earth-worm ; of the future, and its unknown eternity. He began to recall to mind what he had done, which he must account for hereafter. He began to think his acts over one by one. How clear his memory was ! He recollected, as if it were but yesterday, one man whom he had defrauded of all he owned. He had died in that very room, at his feet ; and had cursed him with his dying breath. He knew that that curse was upon him ; he felt its weight palpably pressing him to the earth. Well, the man had died ; they said his heart was broken ; his family had become beggars, and his only child, a beautiful girl, was now a common harlot in the streets. He thought of a poor woman whose son he had imprisoned years before, for a trifling debt. The son died in jail, and the mother went mad, and would watch for hours at the office-door until he came out ; and then would shake her long, skinny finger at him, and laugh in his ear until it made his flesh creep. Then he thought of many who had come to him in his legal capacity ; those whom he was grinding to the dust, to beg for a little delay ; but a week, nay, even a day, and they would pay him all ; but, like a good lawyer, and one who had the interests of his clients at heart, he had crushed them to the earth ; had wrung from them their last cent, and had thrown it into the coffers of the rich whom he served. He had turned a deaf ear to them all ; but they came *now*. They *would* be

heard ! Their cries were ringing in his ear. He fancied that he saw this sad array coming slowly down the dim street ; gliding into the old building one after another : shadowy and spectral, on they came, up the creaking stairs, along the dark entry, until they were crowding at the door of the office. He could hear them whisper, and fancied that they were pointing at him from without.

He drew his chair closer to the fire, and stirred up the dying coals, for he was beginning to be chilly ; and felt that if there were a blaze it would be less lonely. He coughed loudly, too, and rattled the poker against the bars of the grate ; for there was something in the dead silence that made him shudder. The feeling, however, would not go off ; for when he ceased, the stillness seemed more intense and fearful. He would have given worlds to have been in his own room in bed ; but he dared not venture along that dark passage, crowded with accusers. Then he fancied that the office looked darker and more gloomy than usual, and that the lights were duller, and he got up and trimmed them ; but still there was the same dim, uncertain light. He tried to argue himself out of these fears ; to laugh them off as ridiculous ; and he threw himself back in his chair and laughed aloud. If ever mortal man felt the agony of terror, he did ; for at that moment his laugh was echoed from the entry ! Crouching back in his chair, with his heart beating fast and hard, and gasping for breath, his hair bristling, he sat watching the door. He heard a slight motion in the entry, like a sliding, creeping step. It stopped. Then it came again, and nearer ; then a hand touched the knob, and was withdrawn. Then it took it again, turned it, and opened the door ajar ; and two bright eyes glared in through the crack. It opened wider ; and a tall, gaunt figure stole cautiously in, turning the key after it. It then slowly and with

a cat-like step crept toward the attorney, until it came in the full light of the candles.

With a feeling partly of horror and partly of relief, Bolton sprang to his feet as the light revealed to him the ghastly features of Wilkins.

‘Wilkins!’ exclaimed he.

‘That’s me!’ said the other, looking vacantly about him. ‘That’s me! I wonder where Lucy is!’

‘Lucy?—your wife?’ exclaimed the attorney, staring at him. ‘Why, *you* should know. She’s dead, long ago.’

‘They told me so,’ said he, shaking his head sadly; ‘but I did n’t believe it. She would n’t die and leave me all alone. I know she would n’t. It was n’t like her.’

‘Poor fellow!’ muttered Bolton. ‘It’s too true. She’s dead.’

‘Dead! Then who murdered her?’ shouted the maniac, confronting the attorney; ‘who murdered her, I say?’ screamed he, advancing; ‘who murdered her? I’ll *tell* you who did it! It was Reuben Bolton! *He* did it! She told me so, in the grave-yard. I laid my head upon her grave, and she spoke to me, and told me; and I swore I would have revenge! And now I’m looking for him!’

‘Good God! George!’ exclaimed the attorney, shrinking from the excited madman, ‘I never harmed your wife; indeed, I did not!’

‘Who are you?’ demanded Wilkins, clutching him by the coat, and dragging him forward with a strength that his appearance scarcely warranted. ‘Ha! have I found you?’

‘God! George! I never harmed your wife!’ exclaimed Bolton, absolutely paralyzed with fear; ‘never, on my soul!’

‘You lie! you lie! Where *is* she then?’ demanded Wilkins, roused to a perfect frenzy of madness. ‘I swore I’d revenge her! I’ve caught him!—now for his blood!’

Huzza ! huzza !' shouted he, dashing his hand in his bosom, and drawing out a large knife.

'God of heaven ! protect me !' exclaimed the attorney, struggling to get loose. 'Help ! help ! help !'

Now, however, Wilkins was ungovernable. He sprang upon the attorney, and bore him to the earth ; but Bolton was a muscular man, and, driven to desperation, he struggled fiercely. He threw Wilkins from him, and although wounded, contrived to get to his feet and grasp the iron poker. This, however, offered but slight resistance to the maniac. Regardless of blows, he dashed in upon the attorney, and drove the knife to the haft in his stomach, and drew it out with a long downward cut ; and as the wretched man fell, he sprang upon him, and hacked and gashed him until his loud screams were stopped by the blood that gushed up from his throat, and his groans and cries sank into silence.

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IN the morning, when the clerk came to open the office, the key was not in its usual place. He knocked, thinking that business had called the attorney there earlier than usual ; but all was quiet. He went to Bolton's lodgings ; but he had not been there. He returned and wandered about the premises, supposing that Bolton might have gone out, and would be back shortly. But hour after hour passed, and it became late in the morning ; still Bolton did not come. By this time the clerk's anxiety had increased, and fear and suspicion began to take the place of uncertainty. These communicated themselves to others to whom he mentioned them. A small group collected about the house, and finally ascended to the office-door and knocked. No answer. One of them then placed his shoulder to it, and burst it open.

On the floor in front of them, stone-dead, was the lawyer ;

and crouching at his side like a wild beast, with his long talons still clenched in the folds of the cravat of his victim, sat an object which scarcely seemed human; his large eyes glaring like fire from the deep caverns in which they were sunken, his beard black and unshorn, his teeth protruding like fangs, his face dabbled with dirt and blood, his clothes in rags, and his hair hanging like ropes on his shoulders. Such was Wilkins!

They rushed in and dragged him from his prey. He made no resistance, but laughed until he made the building ring; and then with a shout he suddenly broke from them, and darted out of the house with a speed that baffled all pursuit.

There was one tie of relationship that yet linked Wilkins to the earth, and that was a mother, whom he had not seen for years; and toward her home, with that strange instinct that sometimes lingers in a blasted mind when all else is wrecked for ever, he directed his course; sometimes pausing, sometimes straying far off in another direction, but in the end always making that his destination. And so he wandered on until night; and then, haggard and broken down like one in the last stage of mortal disease, he stood before his mother. Thirty miles had the miserable man come that day on foot. His feet were bleeding, and left their red tracks on the floor as he crossed it. 'Lock the door, mother,' said he, gazing wildly about him; 'they're after me!'

'George! my boy! my own dear boy!' exclaimed the old woman, hobbling across the room and flinging her arms about his neck, as soon as she recognized him; 'and you have come at last!'

'Why don't you lock the door?' said he, looking restlessly around as he spoke. 'They're after me; and they'll have me! Oh! mother! save me from them!' And the

wretched outcast threw his arms about her, and buried his face in her bosom, as if he were again a child, and sought the shelter which she once could give.

His mother gradually withdrew herself from his hold, and going to the door, shut and bolted it. 'There, George, you're safe now,' said she; 'now tell me all about it. What ails you? And Lucy, where is she?'

But Wilkins's mind was wandering, and he seemed restless. He got up and went to the door; then returned, and then went to it again, and tried the bolts and bars; and having done this, he sat down and took her hand, and looked up in her face with a childish vacancy that made her fear the worst; and then he laid his head quietly on her knees, and was soon asleep.

He slept for more than an hour; a perturbed and broken slumber, sometimes muttering to himself, sometimes laughing in a low merry tone, and at times gnashing his teeth. At last he awoke, and sat up, gazing about the room.

'Mother!' said he, in a low tone, 'is that you?'

'Yes, my child!' said she, bending over him, and putting his matted hair back from his sunken forehead.

'And it's all a dream!' muttered he; 'all a dream! Well, well; I thought that I had become a man, and had married; and that *she* was in her grave, and that *he* had murdered her, and that I killed him, and that *they* were after me. Is that *blood* on my hands, mother?' said he, suddenly starting up and extending toward her his two hands, which were still stained with the blood of his last night's work. 'Is that blood? Have I killed any body?'

'No, no, my dear boy; you have not!' exclaimed his mother. 'Lie down, lie down; that's a dear boy. You're very tired; so go to sleep.'

Wilkins made no reply; but sat gazing with a troubled

look at his own hands. At last he again laid his head upon her knees. 'Cover me up, mother; I'm very cold.' His mother threw something over him. 'There, now put your arms around me. You'll keep them off when they come, won't you?'

The old woman bent her head over him and wept; and the wretched man, nestling up to her like a child, looked in her face and smiled, then laid his head down and closed his eyes.

He never opened them again; for when his mother attempted to arouse him, after a long time, his head fell back. Wilkins was dead!

CHAPTER XXXII.

FAR and wide rang the news of that fearful murder. Men stopped each other to talk of it in the crowded streets, and women gossiped over it at their fire-sides until they drove the blood from their own cheeks. From morning till night hundreds loitered about the blood-stained building, gazing at its old walls and crumbling cornices with that mixture of apprehension and delight which go hand in hand so strangely. Some were busy in conjecturing which was the room wherein the deed was done. Some stood in silence with folded arms. One or two ventured into the passage and up the stairs; and as they creaked beneath their tread, they sank their voices and spoke in whispers; and having looked at the door of the office, and pointed it out to each other, they slunk out, without going in, glad to be once more in the open air. At last the police took the matter in hand. They were used to such matters. They went to the room and examined it; overhauled the papers, winked their eyes solemnly at the bloody knife, which still lay on the floor; shook their heads and made profound remarks to each other, in a tone which struck peculiar awe to the hearts of three small boys who had followed at their heels. After taking voluminous notes, they came out, shut the door with a loud bang, and locked it, so that none should enter. The crowd hung about the spot for several days; but as the wonder grew stale, it gradually melted away, leaving the old house to silence and an evil name.

But bright things were in store for others who have largely

figured in this story. Mingled with the rumors which were rife respecting the death of the attorney, was one of the detection of the foul fraud attempted by him against the daughter of Mr. Crawford, which had been brought to light by letters found in his possession at the time of his death. These reports, reaching the ears of Mr. Camden, hastened his movements. He forthwith proceeded to the city with the authentic Will of Mr. Crawford in his possession. Before his arrival, having been informed of all that had transpired respecting the forged document, and being ignorant of the address of Miss Crawford, he went directly to Mr. Fisk, to whom he delivered the real Will, and who immediately took the proper steps to have it admitted to probate, and the previous one annulled.

Great was the joy of Dr. Thurston on receiving this news. He hastened to Miss Crawford's house, and kicked the slow servant, partly because he kept him waiting too long at the door, and partly because he told him that what he was so anxious to communicate belonged to that valuable class of information called, by way of distinction, 'piper's news.' Once in the house, he hurried to Miss Crawford's apartment, took both of her hands, shook them violently, gave her a hearty salute, and then trotted out of the room. When in the entry, however, it struck him that he had not sufficiently testified his satisfaction; so he opened the door, thrust in his head, and exclaiming, 'Damme! I'm delighted!' shut it after him, and sallied into the parlor, where he repeated nearly the same ceremonies (omitting the salute) upon Wharton, whom he found sitting there. Having thus got rid of the first ebullition of his satisfaction, he commenced walking up and down the room, rubbing his hands together as if deriving intense enjoyment from the operation; occasionally chuckling, and hugging himself up as if lately seized with a violent

and somewhat spasmodic attachment to his own person. At last he stopped in front of Wharton :

‘Frank!’ said he.

Wharton looked up.

‘Helen is a fine girl — a very fine girl; I think I might venture to say, a d — d fine girl!’

Having thus vindicated Miss Crawford’s character, and clenched the last assertion by a blow of his fist on the table, he again paced the room, rubbing his hands, and hugging himself more violently than ever; while Wharton patiently waited for the conclusion of the sentence, which his knowledge of the Doctor’s habits made him aware would come in due season.

Rich, too — rich, Frank; handsome, young — a glorious girl! — a prize for a king! Is n’t she?’ And he now looked at him until he received an assenting answer.

‘No body in the world to care for her but me, is there?’

Again he paused, and looked Wharton steadily in the face; but this time no answer came.

‘Very well. I thought as much. She’s all alone, poor girl! She’s under some obligations to me, too; and she sha’n’t go a-begging for a protector. I’m not so *very* old. Look at that leg!’ said he, stretching out his right supporter, ‘and that arm; firm as iron! I’ll marry her myself!’

As he said this, he turned on his heel and resumed his walk, without appearing to notice the deep flush which had covered Wharton’s face while he was speaking.

‘Do n’t you think she’ll take me, Frank?’ said he, again checking himself in mid career, in front of Wharton’s chair. ‘I *know* she will! She’d be very ungrateful if she did not — very ungrateful! Come, Frank, you must go at once, and make the offer for me. Be about it, boy — be about it! I’m afraid some one else will get the start of me.’

Wharton turned very pale, and then said :

‘My dear Doctor, I think — that is — I would rather that you should select some other person. I am sure that I should make but a bad messenger. I am certain that I should fail.’

‘Why?’ said the old man, eyeing him sharply; ‘why?’

Wharton became slightly embarrassed; at length he said: ‘To be candid with you, I have feelings and wishes with respect to Miss Crawford totally at variance with your success; and therefore it is unfair in you to ask me to make a proposal which, if successful, must ruin my own happiness.’

‘You have?’ said the Doctor, quietly.

‘I have.’

‘And you intend to press your suit in opposition to mine? and now that you find all my hopes of happiness are centred in that girl and her welfare, you do not hesitate to thwart the intentions of the old man who has been a father to you, and has protected you from childhood, and to blight the dearest wish of his heart? Is this so, Frank?’

It was a hard task for Wharton to struggle against feelings which he had cherished for years; but he did so; and at last he took the hand of the Doctor, and said: ‘No, my old friend, I will not. You shall meet no obstacle from me. Marry her if you can. She’s a noble girl. God forbid that I, by word or deed, should bring upon myself the charge of ingratitude, by crossing the path of one who has always been my best friend. But you must seek some one else to bear your message, for I cannot; indeed I cannot.’

‘And you will not endeavor to prevent my fulfilling my intention?’

‘Indeed I will not!’ replied Wharton, earnestly.

‘Well, I did not expect that,’ said the Doctor coldly. ‘Did n’t I bring you up from the time that you were no higher than my knee? Answer me *that!*’

‘You have been very kind to me,’ said Wharton.

‘Well, I’m glad you admit *that*. There’s some truth left, I see. Now answer me this question: Had n’t I a right to expect that, as I grew old and feeble, you would be a stay to me, and would counsel me, and, if needs be, shield me from harm? Had n’t I a right to expect all this, I say?’

‘You had, indeed,’ replied Wharton; ‘and as far as I am able, you shall always find me ready to repay the debt of kindness which I acknowledge.’

‘*Shall I?*’ said the Doctor, with a sneer. ‘This looks like it; for at this very moment, when I, almost in my dotage, and scarcely able to carry my own tottering carcass, talk of committing such a downright piece of folly as that of running off with a gay, giddy girl, who would lead me the Devil’s own life — a rattling, wild hoyden, who would raise such a din about my old ears that I should be glad to tumble out of the world at a hop-skip-and-jump to get rid of her — you, in the most demure manner, say that, although you will not assist in, yet you will not stir a finger to prevent the consummation of this outrageous piece of folly! As I said before, I did not expect this of you.’

‘But, my dear Sir,’ said Wharton, ‘what do you want? What *should* I do?’

‘Do? I’ll tell you what *I* would do. If I were in your place, I would step up to my venerable friend, and would say to him: ‘My dear old fellow, do n’t be a fool! I won’t permit it. You must not make such a sacrifice at your years. Sooner than that, I’ll offer myself as a substitute, and will take the girl off your hands.’ *That’s* what I would do.’

‘Oh!’ said Wharton, whose face began to brighten, ‘I understand.’

‘You do? Well, it’s time. And you’ll make the sacrifice?’

‘I will.’

‘When?’

‘Let me choose my own time,’ said Wharton; ‘for, considering the picture which you have just drawn of the life which I am to lead, I think that I ought not to be hurried.’

The old man took a pinch of snuff, and shaking his head, said :

‘You’re a droll fellow. Have it your own way.’ Putting his cane under his arm, he went into the street and walked three blocks, rubbing his hands, and hugging himself without intermission, to the great amazement of three servants and six boys, who set him down for a lunatic lately eloped from some pleasant asylum.

Wharton kept his promise ; and before a year was out he had offered himself as a substitute for the Doctor, and was accepted, and sacrificed according to agreement.

On the day succeeding the murder, Mr. Higgs, ignorant of what had happened, was making the best of his way to the attorney’s office. He thought it strange that a crowd should be lingering about the door and looking up at the windows as if there were something very remarkable in what had hitherto struck him as a house very far gone in dilapidation, and not at all peculiar for any thing except an extremely rusty and gloomy exterior. Elbowing his way through the throng, he was on the point of entering the door, when his arm was touched, and looking round, he perceived the stunted marker, his usually composed countenance lighted up with an expression of great interest, beckoning him to follow. At the same time, he quickly, but cautiously placed his finger on his lip. Higgs did not know what to make of this manœuvre, but he did not forget that the marker was shrewd and intelligent, and rarely acted without

a motive; so he turned in the direction which he had taken.

‘You had better evaporate!’ said the boy, as soon as they were out of ear-shot of the crowd. ‘What the blazes brought you here, when all your plans is bu’st up, and you ’m got to streak it? Why a’n’t you off?’

Higgs favored the boy with a look of intense investigation, and then said: ‘Go on, Charley; what’s to pay?’

‘Then you have n’t heard it?’

‘No, and am not likely to, if you keep on asking questions instead of answering them. What is it?’

‘*This* is it,’ said the boy earnestly: ‘Wilkins is settled the hash of that legal gen’leman, Bolton, last night; slashed him all to slivers; and when they bu’st into his office this morning, they found him as dead as a hammer.’

‘Great God!’ ejaculated Higgs. ‘Well? well?’

‘Well,’ said the boy, ‘that was n’t the wo’st of it. Wilkins is mad and t’ other dead; so that there’s not much can be done to them, and they intend to take the balance out of your hide; — that’s wot they’re arter, my boy. They found letters of yourn to the lawyer, and letters of his’n, all about that Will; and the police have got all on ’em, and will soon be arter you. So I think you’d better be off. That’s all.’

‘Is this true, Charley, upon your word?’ said Higgs, after a short pause.

‘What do you s’pose them people is looking at that house for, if it a’n’t?’ said the boy, pointing to the crowd. ‘They’ve all seed it a hundred times afore; but if you don’t believe me, go and ask at the police. They’ll tell you more; but perhaps they’ll invite you to stop to tea arterwards, and when you’re done, won’t let you go then, nuther, but insist on your taking a bed too. For my part, I think I’d sooner ask some one else, and lose the bed and supper both — that’s what I think.’

‘I think so myself, Charley,’ said Mr. Higgs, ‘and I’ll remember the good turn you’ve done me this day; I *will*, Charley; and if ever you are in trouble, come to me and I’ll help you. By Heaven! I will. If I have but a shilling, you shall share it. Good-bye! I have thought hard of you, but I find the Devil is not as black as he’s painted.’

‘I find the same identical thing,’ said the marker, composedly, thrusting his hands in his pockets; ‘but you’d better trot. Off with you!’

Urged this second time, Higgs hurried off, while the marker sauntered back to the house to pick up more gossip.

From that day Mr. Higgs was absent from his usual haunts; and at the same time a gentleman singularly like him in personal appearance took lodgings in a small attic, in an unfrequented part of the city, where he locked himself up, and saw no body except a small stunted boy, who occasionally called and had long and confidential conversations with him in so low a tone that none could overhear them. The rest of the time the stranger passed in reading the newspapers and imbibing beer with great perseverance and relish. His name, however, was Brown.

For days after the appearance of Mr. Brown at his new lodgings, the noise of the murder spread through the city. In broad thoroughfares where the butterflies of the world sunned themselves, and in narrow alleys where thieves skulked and the poor festered, it found its way. Every thing connected with it came to the broad glare of day; and among other things the last letter from Higgs to the attorney figured in the public journals with a frequency which, in any other case, Mr. Higgs might have thought quite desirable. It was generally followed by a firm assurance from the editor to his readers, that a warrant was out against Higgs, that the police were on his track, and that he could not escape.

Mr. Brown had been living in privacy for some days when this paragraph met his eye. Having concluded it, he laid his paper on the floor, uttered the single monosyllable, 'D—n !' buttoned his coat to the chin, put on his hat, drained to the very dregs a small mug which had contained ale, and opening the door of his room, quietly decamped. Mr. Brown never returned to his lodgings, nor was Higgs ever taken, notwithstanding the predictions of the editor and the noted vigilance of the police, which worthy department felt deeply aggrieved that the offender should escape its clutches, the laws be set at defiance, and a reward of \$500, offered for his apprehension, be unpocketed.

Of Mr. Higgs nothing more is known ; but shortly after the disappearance of Mr. Brown from his abode, that gentleman arrived in Texas, where he soon became engaged in an extensive law-practice, being particularly well versed in the criminal branches of that science, and profoundly learned in the law relating to Wills. I am informed, however, that the effect of his intense application to business is showing itself in his eyes and nose, the former of which are becoming somewhat weak, and the latter slightly red at the end. It has been suggested by some ill-meaning person that Mr. Brown and Higgs were the same individual ; but such a suggestion could only have emanated from an evil-minded person, and should be frowned down as a vile slander against a man of unimpeachable character.

Mr. Rawley and his dog, a few years since, left their former place of abode without mentioning their intentions to any one ; and so profound is the mystery attached to their departure, that I am informed neither his wife nor sixty-two creditors, nor five deputy-sheriffs, who have shown a most lively interest in his welfare by diligently searching for him from that time to the present, have been able to throw any

light upon the subject. At first it was feared that he might have jumped into the dock and bathed himself out of the world, and it was suggested that if the river were dragged his body would be found. But his antipathy to water, unless diluted with some stimulant, having been duly reflected on, it was concluded that not even a strong hankering for sudden death could have overcome *that*; and the idea was abandoned as preposterous.

About a year after Mr. Rawley's departure, Mr. Quagley struck up an intimacy with his deserted wife. His visits became more and more regular; he sat longer, and seemed to think more profoundly; once or twice in the presence of the lady he complained of a little kind of flurry about the heart, and then shook his head mysteriously at her; and on one occasion, when departing, being accompanied by her to the door, a succession of short, sudden reports, not unlike the corks popping out of overcharged porter-bottles, was heard in the entry. This discharge of artillery was accompanied by a very gentle scream, and in a short time Mrs. Rawley returned a little flushed in the face, adjusting her cap, which had in some unaccountable manner got out of place, probably in endeavoring to stop up the bottle from which the noise proceeded; and Mr. Quagley was heard chuckling to himself, and muttering as he went past the window: 'Cuss me! but she is n't so bad!' From the direction in which all these straws were blowing, and from the fact that Mr. Quagley one day said, in the most resolute manner, 'If he would n't like to know whether that there Rawley had hopped the twig or not, he hoped he might be sniggered,' it was strongly suspected that he had designs on the lady in question.

But the best-laid plans sometimes fail, and Mr. Quagley was a striking illustration of the truth of this novel maxim;

for one fine afternoon, after having been uncommonly merry, and having, as he metaphorically remarked, 'oiled the wheels of life's locomotive with a slight sling or two,' he gradually retired into what he called a 'brown study,' a peculiar state of mind and body into which he was in the habit of relapsing after indulging the unctuous process just mentioned, and reposing his body on a chair, and his head in a corner, he soon became merged in a profound calm. The usual hour for his leaving his study having passed, it struck the stunted marker that it was both longer and browner than common. On attempting to awaken him, however, he discovered that his studies were ended for ever, and that 'life's locomotive' had burst its boiler, and got off the track.

The establishment was broken up; the table sold; the 'Retreat' disappeared, and the poor marker, after sauntering about the streets for several days with his hands in his pockets, whistling a careless tune with a heavy heart, betook himself to selling newspapers, an avocation in which he acquired great distinction by the ease of his manners and the harmonious fluency with which the names of a dozen or twenty journals flowed from his lips, without his missing a syllable or catching a breath. Having accumulated a small capital in this profession, and being of an ambitious turn, he gave it the go-by, and is at present a sub-editor to a leading journal in this city.

Mrs. Dow, on recovering from her fainting-fit at the Surrogate's office, retreated to her house in deep wrath; and having spent an hour in tearing her hair and gnashing her teeth—which, the former being a wig and the latter false, and originally grown in the mouth of a negro who had died of the small-pox, was not accompanied by any great bodily inconvenience—she retired to her own room, opened a desk, and without word or comment other than a spasmodic effort

at swallowing an imaginary potato which rose in her throat, committed a large package of letters to the flames. She then went down stairs and rang the parlor-bell.

‘Aaron, do you know of the affront which has been put on me?’ said she, in a subdued tone, as the man-servant walked deliberately to the middle of the room and stopped.

‘I do,’ said Aaron.

‘How shall I be revenged? I shall die if I a’ n’t.’

‘Marry some one else.’

‘Who?’

‘Me!’ replied Aaron.

The perspiration stood in large drops on Aaron’s forehead as he uttered this bold piece of advice, and he looked apprehensively toward the door; but it was received with more favor than he had anticipated; and but a very short time had elapsed before the man-servant had actually kissed the widow, a performance which he might have repeated, had not the lady suggested that she was in a state of high excitement, which proceedings of that nature tended rather to increase than diminish, and begged him to consider how recently her feelings had been lacerated by the most barbarous of men. Aaron took the hint; but he nevertheless urged his suit with such warmth and success, that Mrs. Dow consented to change her state that very day. Before night the ceremony was performed, and instead of supping in the kitchen, Aaron took his tea in the parlor; the red-haired cook with prominent teeth officiating as waiter, that situation being resolutely declared by Aaron to be vacant, in defiance of the entreaties of his wife, who begged him to perform the duties but for that single night. But Aaron was so obstinately astonished that his lady could even think of employing him in such menial occupations, that she yielded the point; and the red-haired cook was called from the regions below to act in his place.

Phillips yet lives; still the same generous fellow that he ever was, with a hand and heart always open to the voice of suffering. Many a spirit which was weary and heavy-laden has been lightened by his kindness, and many a sad eye has learned to glow with pleasure at the sight of him. Though his means are scanty, he never makes that a plea for turning a deaf ear to the cry of distress; and his ready aid has often sustained those whom misfortune had driven to the verge of despair, and rescued those whom want had kept balancing between hunger and crime. Although his connection with this story has been a painful one, let us hope that there may still be pleasant dreams in store for him, and that he may yet meet with instances where a wife's love was rewarded, and where a husband knew how to appreciate that best gift in life.

A FEW words respecting himself and his friends, and JOHN QUOD will lay aside his pen.

I had not proceeded far in the preceding narrative, when letter after letter dropped in, until my number of correspondents became so numerous that, being somewhat slow of thought, and by no means a ready writer, I found the answering them no slight task. At that period I broke off all public notice of them, and addressed myself more particularly to the continuation of my story.

Not long after this, while sitting in my room, with my dog asleep at my feet, I heard a sharp knock at the door; and before I could reply to it, a stout man, fashionably dressed, and carrying a thick stick under his arm, entered, accompanied by an iron-gray bull-dog of the most unprepossessing countenance. The gentleman held the door open

until the dog was in the room, then walked up to me, slapped me somewhat roughly on my left shoulder, which is a little rheumatic, and introduced himself as Mr. Snagg, and his companion as a great-grandson of that invaluable dog Slaughter, whose loss he should ever deplore, and respecting whom he had written to me. I could not but give a cordial reception to one who had evinced so much good feeling toward me, and I requested him to be seated. He seemed particularly proud of his dog, and dwelt on his prowess with great satisfaction. By way of showing his unbounded confidence in his abilities, he offered to bet fifty dollars that he would set him on my dog, who had judiciously retreated under a distant chair, and that in three minutes by the watch he would 'rip him all to smash.' I declined the proposition, at the same time admitting that an appearance of great talent of that peculiar description was stamped upon the countenance of his dog. This seemed to satisfy him, and the conversation took a general turn.

From that time he became a daily visitor at my rooms, kindly volunteering his opinion through the whole of the preceding narrative, and criticising it with a most friendly freedom and diffuseness. It is owing to him, however, that I have been able to pursue my avocations without molestation; for not a few of the various communications received by me were of an unfriendly character. Some persons wanted to know whether my descriptions were personal; whether they referred to them and theirs; and one gentleman swore, that if Mrs. Dow was meant for his aunt, who died in Havana in the year '16, he'd make me smell thunder; a perfume which, from his tone and manner of offering it, I presume must be very disagreeable.

The answering these letters, and adjusting all difficulties arising from them, Mr. Snagg kindly took upon himself; and

though I am ignorant of his mode of compromising them, it certainly was most effectual, for I was never troubled with a second communication from any of those whom he visited. Once, in particular, I received a note which concluded with the rather hostile hint that 'the skin of a cow was not unfrequently used for other purposes than that of shoe-leather.' Being an elderly man, and somewhat timorous, this letter agitated me not a little; but Mr. Snagg, with his usual friendly feeling, having taken it from my hand and perused it from beginning to end, begged me to make myself perfectly easy, as he would settle the difficulty at once. Putting on his hat, he forthwith proceeded to the residence of the writer, accompanied by his dog. What occurred there I never knew; but I observed, on Mr. Snagg's return, that his face was slightly discolored in the neighborhood of the left eye, and that his dog amused himself during the whole of that afternoon by shaking violently the skirt of a coat which he brought with him in his mouth, and which certainly did not belong to the coat of Mr. Snagg. I am happy to add that I received no further communication from the gentleman in question.

Another person to whom I am under no slight obligation is the constable from whom, as I have mentioned before, I learned many of the facts of my tale. He has looked over my MS. with great care, at times suggesting alterations and adding new matter, which once or twice I feared might have been borrowed from the regions of romance. But he so pertinaciously maintained his own accuracy, talking warmly of his honor, and swearing to his own veracity with such vehemence, that I felt to doubt longer would be doing him a great injustice.

So far all had gone well; but there are clouds even in a sunny sky; and a heavy shadow seemed to fall upon me one

day, when the little boy who had so often nestled in my arms, and made my room merry with his voice, informed me that his parents intended to quit the city, and that he had come to take his leave. It was a sad hour for me; but he went off, and the last I saw of him was when he stopped before turning a corner and waved his hand to me as I leaned out of my window to look after him. It grew dark while I was leaning out of that window, but he did not return; and I closed the sash and sat down in my room with a heavier heart than I had known for years.

As I take a warm interest in every thing about me, I have met with another source of trouble in the person of my dog. I know not how it occurred, but one day he left me in high dudgeon at a fancied insult, and I am much afraid that, in an unguarded moment, and under the influence of ill-humor, he ventured to interfere in some vulgar brawl in which he had no concern; for that night he returned to my room with his tail cut off. He has never been the same dog from that hour; and although, with the philosophy peculiar to his character, he endeavors to bear up against his loss, it evidently affects his spirits. I once observed him in sad contemplation of a large wood-cut illustrative of the fox that had lost his tail; but it did not appear to comfort him, for after pondering over it for some time, he shook his head in a manner indicating that it was all nonsense, and walked gloomily over to my house. I think I may safely say that, in all respects, except the regularity with which he comes to his meals, and the rapidity with which he swallows them, he is an altered animal.

And now, in reply to a question as to the legal accuracy of this story, I must add, that I believe it to be correct. At all events, it is sufficiently accurate for all purposes, and to any thing more I did not aspire: for in the matter of Wills

I have had but little experience, and never in the course of my practice did I come in contact with an entire live surrogate. Transient glimpses of that ominous magistrate, (who was always associated in my mind with the undertaker, the sexton, and the grave-digger,) as others entered his office, were all that I ever had. The shelves with their heavy volumes were unexplored by me, and the clerk with a frizzled wig never had his reveries disturbed by my footstep. The reason is plain; when at the bar I had but one client, a ragged, out-at-elbows fellow, who lived by his wits, and died many years since, leaving few except me to grieve for him, (for he was a friend as well as a client,) and nothing but debts behind him; a species of property which, although very liberally diffused throughout society, I have generally discovered that no one seems anxious to administer on. He was never litigious. He permitted those of his creditors who chose to *do* so, to get judgments against him, without opposition; and although in the heat of my legal fervor I hinted to him of the delay which he might obtain by my assistance, he merely said: 'No, no; poor devils! let them get a judgment, if it's any comfort to them, for they are not likely to get any thing else.' He was a true prophet; for he died as he had lived—penniless; and the cost of his funeral came out of my pocket.

But I am growing garrulous, and it is time that I should break off, and say that single sad word, 'Farewell!' It is a heavy word for all to utter; but more particularly for the aged; and I must confess myself loth to end a companionship which I hope has grown up between us during the long months of a whole year; for I fancied that I had established an intimacy with my readers; and that while I was at work in my solitary room, a feeling of kindness toward me might lurk in some out-of-the-way corner of their hearts, and that

their thoughts would sometimes wander off to my dim chamber and its time-worn occupant. These were pleasant fancies; and even if I deceived myself by entertaining them, still they served to cheer me on in the early part of this long-spun tale; to make me sad as I saw it drawing to a close; and to render it no light task to say to those who have patiently followed me through, 'Farewell!' It is a matter of much uncertainty whether we shall ever meet again; for my blood is running slowly, my limbs are trembling, and ere long this heart may be cold, and JOHN QUOD be only a name.

The End.

